

PATRIOTIC SHAKESPEARE:
THE IDEALISING
OF
KING RICHARD II & HENRY BOLINGBROKE / KING HENRY IV
AS
BIBLICAL TYPES

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ABSTRACT

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was a monumental event which inspired William Shakespeare and other English playwrights to dramatise the recent history of their country. The history of fifteenth century England, however, is not the history of another “Eden, demi-paradise”, but the history of the “field of Golgotha” where royal kings were slain and ambitious nobles waged civil war. Influenced by the recent publications of the English Bible, Shakespeare reconciled his patriotic inclinations with reality by idealising several of the kings and nobles (as well as a queen) who played a principal part in the history of pre-Tudor and Tudor England, as biblical types. In Part One of this thesis, I argue that King Richard II in the play of that name, is portrayed as a type of Christ whose death becomes not a grubby murder, but a sacrifice which leads initially to King Henry V, the “mirror of all Christian kings” and ultimately to Queen Elizabeth. In Part Two, I argue that Henry Bolingbroke is a type of Satan who coaxes the English people to depose their God-ordained king and crown him; but in both parts of *Henry IV*, he, as the king of that name, acknowledges his “fault”, thereby incurring the favour of a God who sanctifies the usurped Lancastrian throne and postpones His judgment upon the land. The limitations of this thesis will not allow me to present a detailed analysis of Prince Hal/King Henry V as being a prodigal who becomes another type of Christ when he is glorified in the Agincourt campaign. Neither do I examine the characterisation of the hapless King Henry VI, in whose reign the divine retribution of the War of the Roses falls upon England in much the same way that the Babylonians fell upon Jerusalem in 586 B.C. In the Conclusion, I introduce Henry Richmond who, upon killing the “bloody dog” and ending the civil war, becomes yet another deliverer. His prayer for England’s prosperity in the final scene of *Richard III*, foreshadows the coming of the final type of Christ, Queen Elizabeth. Upon her birth, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, a type of Simeon, may express the sentiments of Shakespeare himself as he blesses her, prophesying that her reign will be a type of Millenium when England finally realizes the greatness for which she has been destined.

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PART ONE:

KING RICHARD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the principal systems of thought which, if not accepted, is at least acknowledged by most of the characters within Shakespeare's second tetralogy of historical plays, is the divine right of kings. A certain Tudor homily entitled *The Obedience of A Christian Man* which, according to Tillyard, not only enjoyed a wide circulation throughout the sixteenth century Anglican Church, but may even have influenced Shakespeare himself (65), explains this doctrine. Drawing heavily upon the English Bible, the homily asserts the divine sanctity of kingship, saying, "Let every soul submit himself unto the authority of the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God" (*Romans*, 13:1). The Shakespearean character, John of Gaunt, acknowledges this particular aspect of the divine right when he says, "I may never lift/An angry arm against His minister" (*Richard II*, I.ii.40-1). But the homilist is not merely contented to instruct Tudor Englishmen to honour the king; he also threatens those who, unlike John of Gaunt, dare to lift "an angry arm" against him. Quoting again from *Romans*, he writes, "Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (13:2). The homilist, in an attempt to justify the "damnation" of rebels and revolutionaries, then expounds upon the especially evil consequences of their deeds:

For not only those ordinary and usual mischiefs and miseries of other wars do follow rebellion, as corn and other things necessary to man's use to be spoiled, houses villages towns cities to be taken sacked burned and destroyed, not only many very wealthy men but whole countries to be impoverished and utterly beggared, many thousands of men to be slain and murdered, women and maids to be violated and deflowered.

(qtd. in Tillyard, 70)

But worse yet, the homilist contends, rebellion causes fratricide and patricide, ultimately exposing the God-forsaken country to the calamities of foreign invasion:

The brother to seek and often to work the death of his brother, the son of the father; the father to seek or procure the death of his sons....and so finally to make their country, thus by their mischief weakened, ready to be a prey and spoil to all outward enemies that will invade it, to the utter and perpetual captivity slavery and destruction of all their countrymen their

children their friends their kinsfolks left alive, whom
by their wicked rebellion they procure to be delivered
into the hands of foreign enemies asfar as in them
doth lie.

(qtd. in Tillyard, 70)

And so, by advancing such a threatening doctrine, the Tudor monarchy attempted to elicit the fear, as well as the allegiance of their subjects.

Whether William Shakespeare himself was a monarchist who was persuaded by the arguments of the homilist, cannot, judging solely from the text of the second tetralogy, be determined with any certainty; yet, I think that we may conclude, with reasonable assurance, that Shakespeare was a man who had certain patriotic inclinations. In 1588, when Shakespeare was a young man of twenty five years, he, of course, would have known and possibly even have been pleased that his country's navy, as well as an opportune storm, had destroyed much of the "Invincible Armada". Consisting of some one hundred and thirty ships, forty of which were galleons or large battleships, and tens of thousands of invasionary forces, the Armada had been sent by the Roman Catholic king, Philip II, to destroy the power of what he, as well as most Spaniards and other Catholics, considered to be a wayward nation which had accepted the dangerous heresies of Martin Luther. But the magnitude of the English victory seems only to have encouraged some Englishmen to continue in their Protestantism, as one unidentified witness testified, saying, "We were a nation peculiarly dear to the Almighty, and He showed His favour by raising a storm to overwhelm our enemy when the odds were most terrible" (Laughton, xii). Perhaps Shakespeare himself participated in, or at least witnessed, what one historian has said were the jubilant processions, public bonfires and triumphant thanksgiving to God, which immediately followed the news of Drake's victory (Williamson, 333).

The outcome of the battle of the Gravelines may very well have had enormous implications: Rutland contends that, as a result of this one naval victory, England was fully awakened to a sense of her nationhood (7); and Mattingly, the historian, acknowledges the possibility that the defeat of the Armada may have engendered the explosion of literary genius which characterized the last fifteen years of Queen Elizabeth's reign (333-4). This "literary genius" seems to have initially found an expression in a series of historical dramas which were performed in London immediately following the defeat of the Armada: in 1588, the *Famous Victories of Henry V*; in 1591, the *Troublesome Reign of King John* and in 1592, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. Shakespeare, it is believed, was in London by 1592, and certainly would have been exposed to, or even influenced by these and other plays

which examined the history of a nation “peculiarly dear to the Almighty”. Indeed, by 1593, Shakespeare had written the whole of the first tetralogy, and by 1599, just eleven years after the battle, he had written all of the English history plays with the exception of *Henry VIII*. And it should be noted that within his nine English history plays, he preserves many, if not most of the historical names, places and events which Holinshed records in his *Chronicles*. For example, in *1 Henry IV*, we read of the Scottish invasion, Hotspur’s prisoners, Mortimer’s ransom, the Percies’ conspiracy, Northumberland’s sickness, Hal’s battle-wound, Blunt’s and Hotspur’s deaths on the battlefield and Douglas’ pardon: all of which are events originating in Holinshed. Moreover, Shakespeare even sees fit to record such seemingly insignificant and irrelevant details of Holinshed’s account as “the beastly shameless transformation” (I.i.44) which the Welshwomen performed on the corpses of the dead royalist soldiers. Of course, Shakespeare deviates from the *Chronicles*, occasionally changing, to suit his own dramatic purposes, the ages of his characters and the chronology of their exploits: the historical King Henry IV, for example, was actually younger than Hotspur, but is cast as an exhausted middle-aged man to elicit the audience’s sympathy; and Carlisle actually spoke his prophecy against Bolingbroke, not during, but after King Richard’s deposition ceremony. But these deviations are minor and we may reasonably conclude that the larger part of his history plays accurately, but generally reflects the chronicles because the playwright himself respects his nation’s history and wishes to faithfully preserve and present it, as far as is dramatically possible, in his plays. Clearly, he is capable of seriously altering Holinshed by introducing principal characters who have no historical precedent, but perhaps it is a patriotic spirit which prevents him from doing so.

It is a commonplace that John of Gaunt’s speech is a testimony of patriotic zeal:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden, demi paradise...
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings.
(*Richard II*, II.i.40-2,50-1)

But do these lines express the sentiments of the playwright himself? Of course, we do not know, but it is significant that the speech ends with two references to the concept of England’s “shame”: England is “bound in with shame” (II.i.63) and “hath made a shameful conquest of itself” (II.i.66). Perhaps Gaunt is referring to

the shame of his brother's murder, or perhaps the playwright himself is expressing his own sentiments: indeed, I suggest that Shakespeare, inspired with a certain newly-found patriotism, is distressed and even ashamed to contemplate the recent history of the "royal throne of kings". Holinshed's account of pre-Tudor England is a disturbing record of usurpation, regicide and twenty five years of civil war. Likewise, such concepts of death and bloodshed are themes which haunt the whole of the second tetralogy, finally culminating in the "bloody wretch", King Richard III. King Richard II talks of "wading in our kindred's blood" (*Richard II*, I.iii.138); Carlisle talks of the "blood of English manuring the ground" (*Richard II*, IV.i.137); and King Henry frets, mentioning the "thirsty entrance of this soil/...daub[ing] her lips with her own children's blood" (*I Henry IV*, I.i.5-6). It is my interpretation of the Henriad that Shakespeare reconciles his concept of a "demi-paradise" to the grubby realities of regicide and a bloody civil war, by likening English history to the history of the world as it is outlined and foretold in the Bible. In a limited regard, I think that Shakespeare is portraying English history as a type of biblical history.

I hasten to add that I am in no manner attempting to "prove" that Shakespeare was a Christian or even accepted some of the doctrines of Christianity; nor I am attempting to assert that only a biblical interpretation of the tetralogies is the "correct" interpretation; but I am arguing that Shakespeare was not a little influenced by a unique phenomenon which, in the sixteenth century, was unprecedented in the history of Western Civilization: the publication of a number of English translations of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of both the Old and the New Testaments. It would have been difficult for Shakespeare to have ignored or discarded a Book which was so dearly esteemed by those who translated it, William Tyndale, John Rogers, Thomas Cranmer and others, that they were willing to be burned to death rather than renounce what they considered to be its sacred contents. One of the martyrs who died in the Marian persecutions, Hugh Latimer, said to a fellow martyr as they were both tied to the stake: "Be of good comfort Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out" (qtd. in Cowart, 56). To what extent was Shakespeare, who was born only nine years after Latimer's death, influenced by the candle which Latimer and the other reformers had lit? One American writer has stated, "So deeply did Shakespeare drink from the wells of scripture that without the Bible, Shakespeare could not have been; and were it possible to suppress every copy of Scripture, the Bible, in its essence and spirit, in its supreme doctrines of infinite justice, mercy, love, and redemption, as well as a vast store of its more treasured

sayings, would yet live in the pages of England's greatest poet" (qtd. in Sawyer, 1). Of course, Shakespeare was influenced by other sources, notably the English translations of the Greek writers, Plutarch and others, but it cannot be doubted by anyone who is even remotely familiar with his plays, that Shakespeare was intimately acquainted with the theology, history and especially the characters of the Bible. And so, I will argue throughout this thesis that *Richard II*, *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV* are the work of a patriotic Shakespeare who idealises the history of his country according to the biblical model which he knew so well.

Describing the historical King Richard, Holinshed writes, "He was prodigal, ambitious, and much given to the pleasure of the bodie" (qtd. in Boswell, 129). In Part One of this thesis, I argue that Shakespeare never portrays the king in such a disapproving manner, but instead, resists a judgment made by a Tudor historian attempting to justify the deposition and hence legitimise the Tudor claim; and designs the king to be a type of Christ who, like Christ, is slandered by a circle of characters whose integrity, or in the case of Gaunt, competence, is suspicious. I argue that both York and Northumberland are false witnesses, and Gaunt an unreliable one. Like Christ, King Richard perceives a certain methodology in his death, but ultimately fails to understand the reasons which motivate Providence to allow it. For Shakespeare, King Richard's death is not so much the ignominious murder of a grubby man, but a sacrifice which leads to a type of millennial kingdom, ruled by another type of Christ, Queen Elizabeth. In the culmination of the tetralogies, *Henry VIII*, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer pronounces a prophetic blessing upon the infant princess, which is clearly meant to parallel the blessing which Simeon pronounced upon the infant Christ as He was brought to the temple for His circumcision. That Shakespeare may have considered Queen Elizabeth to be a deliverer and her administration a paradise, is not difficult to understand when we consider the terrible suffering which was endured by some Englishmen during the War of the Roses and especially during the reign of Bloody Mary.

In Part Two of my thesis, I argue that Bolingbroke is a type of Satan whom God raises up, like a Pharoah or a Judas, to depose and murder "His deputy anointed" (*Richard II*, I.ii.38). Unlike the biblical Satan, however, the Shakespearean Bolingbroke is transformed and experiences a remorse or even guilt for his "crime". Such an opinion is, I realize, extremely controversial since the New Historicists and many other modern critics interpret the discourses of King Henry, in which he repeatedly speaks of God and the crusade, as being Machiavellian ploys to appease his religiously-minded subjects and thus solidify his political power. But I will defend my premise that King Henry is genuinely

penitent (although I certainly acknowledge serious discrepancies within his character) because such an interpretation is crucial to a biblical interpretation of the *Henriad*. In the book of *2 Samuel* we read that King David, having committed adultery and murder, received the judgment of God from Nathan the prophet: “The sword shall never depart from thine house” (*2 Samuel*, 12:10a). But the king clearly acknowledges and confesses his sin, saying, “I have sinned against the Lord” (*2 Samuel*, 12:13a). Because of King David’s penitence, the “sword” was permitted to destroy neither his kingdom nor his son’s, and King Solomon established himself as one of the wisest and richest kings who ever lived, before his own son, King Rehoboam, witnessed the division of the Jewish nation into a northern and a southern kingdom. The biblical precedent is also established in the history of King Hezekiah, who sinned when he received Prince Berodach-baladan, the son of the king of Babylon, and revealed all of the “treasures” of Israel to him. Isaiah the prophet told him the judgment of God, saying:

Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house,
and that which thy father’s have laid up in store unto
this day, shall be carried unto Babylon: nothing shall
be left, saith the Lord.

(*II Kings*, 20:17)

Because of King Hezekiah’s remorse, he himself was spared the judgment of God, which was only realized upon his great, great grandson, the hapless King Jehoiakim, when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and enslaved its citizens in 586 B.C. In the interim, however, the great grandson of King Hezekiah, King Josiah, established himself, like King Solomon before him, as one of the greatest of the Jewish kings, destroying idols and walking in the law of Moses. And the biblical precedent is again established in King Ahab who received God’s judgment for his “wickedness” and put on “sackcloth”. Consequently, the Lord said to Elijah:

Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?
because he humbleth himself before me, I will not
bring the evil in his days: but in his son’s days will I
bring the evil upon his house.

(*I Kings*, 21:29)

If it can be shown that King Henry IV, like King David, King Hezekiah and King Ahab before him, sincerely acknowledges his faults which in his case include usurpation and regicide, then it can be reasonably concluded that a merciful God not only forgives him, as he did the Jewish kings, but that he also bestows a certain

legitimacy and even sanctity upon his throne. Moreover, we may also conclude, based on the three previously cited biblical models, that a penitent King Henry IV also causes a divine retribution to be delayed, allowing for the “glorious” reign of the “mirror of all Christian kings”, King Henry V, which, like the successful reigns of King Solomon and King Josiah, only temporarily precedes the coming of a national catastrophe in the form of the War of the Roses.

Brian Vickers cautions all Shakespearean critics to desist from the error of portraying certain characters as merely “traces” or “purely verbal effects” which are then forced into preconceived patterns of interpretation (372). Although a biblical reading of Shakespeare's portrayal of King Richard and Henry Bolingbroke/King Henry IV is valid, I acknowledge that certain aspects of their characterizations will not easily fit into such an interpretation: firstly, if King Richard is a type of Christ who died for the redemption of humanity, why then does King Richard die? For the redemption of England? From what is England redeemed? As MacKenzie has pointed out in her essay, “Paradise and Paradise Lost”, the English paradise is lost within the play of *Richard II* itself, when either King Richard instigates the murder of the Duke of Gloucester or Bolingbroke invades the realm (326); but in my interpretation the paradise must have been lost before the coming of King Richard, if indeed, he is a redemptive figure. Secondly, if God raises up Bolingbroke to depose and kill “His Richard”, why does He judge that nation for killing him? Thirdly, if King Richard is a type of Christ, why does he whine so much? Although these questions expose weaknesses and failures within my biblical interpretation, they are not fatal to it. Vickers points out that any interpretation of Shakespearean drama, whether it be feminist, deconstructionist, cultural materialist, Marxist or Christian, will ultimately fail to encompass and explain every thematic aspect within any given play (440). Rather than force a controversial speech or theme into an otherwise valid interpretation, it is best to acknowledge the discrepancies and even the contradictions which complicate any interpretation: in so doing, a critic does not necessarily weaken his own argument, but testifies to the genius of a playwright who has the ability to incorporate a variety of themes and philosophical systems within any given play.

And finally, I will throughout my thesis acknowledge the existence of certain opinions of the text which sharply conflict with my own. The New Historicists or Cultural Materialists have turned their sights upon the second tetralogy and formulated an opinion of William Shakespeare which is especially disagreeable to me. According to Graham Holderness and Stephen Greenblatt, Shakespeare is a pragmatist or worse yet, a radical who advances a kind of Machiavellian or Marxist

interpretation of English history, which portrays history not as the “consequence of any providential pattern of metaphysical consequence but as the operation of certain inevitable and amoral laws of history” (Holderness, 90), namely the necessity of class conflict.¹ Yet I am not resolved necessarily to confront their arguments and refute them, mainly because I acknowledge that the text allows the reader to perceive Prince Hal, and all of the Lancasters for that matter, as “conniving hypocrites” (Greenblatt, 30): I simply do not choose to do so. Again, I turn to Brian Vickers whose fundamental principle of interpretation is especially relevant: “All schools...no matter how self-assured or polemical, would do well to accept that other approaches have a validity, and that no one has a monopoly over truth” (440). And Vickers continues saying that “all parties, feminists, cultural materialists, etc., should grant each other the right to read Shakespeare as they wish, only taking a particular critic to task if he or she distorts him” (440). In the same way, Martha Rozett has said that the Shakespearean canon is like a mirror which, upon perusal, simply reflects those things which are within the critic himself (211-2). I agree with both of these open-minded critics, and so I emphasize the biblical sources which underline many of the themes and plots of these plays, never explicitly denying the interpretations of the other school of thought, but also seldom agreeing with them.

NOTES

¹ Cultural Materialism is essentially a reaction against Tillyard's conception of a conservative Shakespeare. According to Tillyard, Shakespeare is the great advocate of the Elizabethan World Picture, writing dramas, especially the History Plays, which celebrate what Tillyard considers to be the dominant Elizabethan belief system, namely cosmic order. Holderness, as well as Dollimore, reject Tillyard's argument because they assert that the notion of a universal philosophy which was acknowledged and accepted by "all" Elizabethans is merely a myth. By asserting that Elizabethan England was a Golden Age of universal harmony, Tillyard, Holderness contends, was offering his readers, shaken by the warfare of 1943, a reason for fighting and enduring: to defend the society which existed once, still remains (implicitly) the "natural" form of political order, and is visible in the works of Shakespeare (Holderness, 29). I agree with Holderness that Tillyard's assertion of what Dollimore calls a "collective mind of the [Elizabethan] people" (5), is too simplistic, failing to acknowledge the contrary historical evidence. And I also agree with the Cultural Materialists that Tillyard used Shakespeare to advance his own agenda, however noble it was. But unlike the Cultural Materialists, I will not reject the heart of Tillyard's argument because I think that that concept of a conservative Shakespeare advocating a universal order is sound, being well supported by the text. Indeed, Lord Hastings declares, "We are time's subjects, and time bids be gone" (2 *Henry IV*, I.iii.110).

CHAPTER II

THE COMPETENT KING

No one would attempt to assert that King Richard is not a character who periodically behaves in a manner which can only be perceived as vain, tedious and even effeminate. How can we seriously regard a king who says, "Go to Flint Castle: there I'll pine away-/A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey" (III.ii.209-10)?¹ To defend such an individual is certainly not a task which is not without its complications; yet I maintain that such a defense is possible: indeed, I think that Shakespeare allows, even encourages his readers to formulate an interpretation of King Richard which is one of a dominant, shrewd, enlightened and of course, passionate man. The issue of King Richard's passion, or as he himself says, his "coward majesty" (III.ii.84) which seems to be the dominant impression that many first-time readers initially (and justifiably) formulate, must initially be addressed. It should be noted, firstly, that King Richard has the decency to have his "ague fit[s] of fear" (III.ii.190) only in the company of his few loyal subjects (In Chapter IX, I will argue that the king's behaviour in the deposition scene is that of a disillusioned, not a cowardly man); and he has the fortitude to recover himself and pronounce bold Timon-like curses on those adversaries who fatally threaten him. Secondly, King Richard is a man who, unreservedly accepting the doctrine of the divine right of kings, is suddenly faced with the prospect of its falsehood, or its application in a manner which is totally foreign to him; the loss of such a belief system would, understandably, be devastating to some men. Thirdly, he is a man who knows, after III.ii, that not only will his kingdom be forcibly and illegally taken from him by subjects who have sworn oaths of obedience to him, but that he will lose his wife Isabella for whom he has a genuine affection, and finally be assassinated. Judged within this context, King Richard refutes such critics as Derek Traversi who unkindly say that he is a man "politically speaking, incapable and morally flawed" (20). If we judge King Richard as he appears in Act One, unthreatened by Bolingbroke's invasionary force, I think that Shakespeare allows the reader to perceive him in quite the opposite manner: even as a competent and enlightened ruler.

In I.i. just before King Richard presides over a legal case in which Henry Bolingbroke, the Duke of Hereford, accuses Thomas Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk, of treason, he asks John of Gaunt:

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all of the lines that are cited in Part One are from *Richard II*.

Tell me, moreover, hast thou sounded him [Bolingbroke],
If he appeal the duke on ancient malice,
Or worthily, as a good subject should,
On some known ground of treachery in him?
(I.i.8-11)

On the one hand, King Richard asks Gaunt whether he has “sounded” his son or learnt the reason why he accuses Mowbray, and then shrewdly suggests, by implication, that it is because he is not a “good subject”. On the other hand, he is “sounding” Gaunt himself, to learn whether he also has perceived a duplicity or treachery in his son. Gaunt’s reply is a model of ambiguity:

As near as I could sift him on that argument,
On some apparent danger seen in him,
Aim’d at your highness, no inveterate malice.
(I.i.12-4)

Ure translates these lines: “...because of something plainly dangerous, aimed at your Highness which he has detected in Mowbray, not because he always hated Mowbray” (4). On one level, he is saying this, but on another Gaunt seems to understand the king’s unspoken questioning of his son’s loyalty and refutes it, saying in my paraphrasical interpretation: “As near as I could sift him on that argument in which you see some apparent danger in him aimed at your Highness, he has no inveterate malice”. Whereas Gaunt’s speech reveals the old man’s confusion and uncertainty, King Richard, in contrast, is depicted in such a manner as to suggest his shrewdness, which is clearly revealed when he rejects the elaborate, but apparently false blessing with which Bolingbroke greets him, but accepts Mowbray’s, saying, “We thank you both, yet one but flatters us” (I.i.25). King Richard is a shrewd king who discerns not only a dangerous enemy in Bolingbroke, but also a dull counsellor in John of Gaunt.

That King Richard perceives a threat in Henry Bolingbroke is an interpretation which is also set forth by Graham Holderness who says that each of these characters is representative of the two classes of medieval society, the nobility and the monarchy, which engaged in continual conflicts. For Holderness, Shakespeare is presenting, in *Richard II*, the demise of the feudal society which maintained the “myth” of an ordered society governed by a divinely-sanctioned monarch. What a pragmatic, perhaps amoral Shakespeare is advancing, Holderness contends, is a Renaissance historiography in which the beginnings of an effective unity between the royal prerogative and the feudal right are being formulated (55-6). To strengthen his position, Holderness then recounts the political history of England from 1386 to 1398 (in two pages!) and concludes that

Shakespeare has accepted Holinshed's judgment that King Richard had become an unpopular tyrant who "began to rule by will more than by reason, threatening death to each that obeyed not his inordinate desires" (qtd. in Holderness, 54); and that Bolingbroke had become a kind of folk hero and focal point of popular discontent. Of course, we would do well to recognize that Holinshed, being a Tudor historian, was of necessity resolved to portray Bolingbroke in a light which is only endearing, since his son's widow was to become the mother of the first Tudor monarch. The legitimisation of a throne which was inherited not by blood-descent, but by usurpation, was obviously a consideration of enormous proportions to a historian who probably feared the repetition of another civil war of succession as well as the displeasure of his employer, King Henry VIII. It becomes necessary, therefore, for Holinshed to present King Richard as a tyrant whose deposition was a logical and necessary action. Herein, I think, lies the underlying weakness of the philosophy of the New Historicism: if a given Shakespearean text is to be interpreted in a particular historical context, whose history will become the factual basis upon which a knowledge of that period is formulated? Many historians advance a particular viewpoint which may be prejudicial or even erroneous: was the historical King Richard undeniably a tyrant; who advances such a judgment and why?

In the trial scene, Bolingbroke is interpreted by Holderness as being in opposition to the king, since he, in his resolution to exact "justice and rough chastisement" (I.i.106) upon his uncle's killers, has taken upon himself the prerogative of the monarch to prosecute the law. Moreover, King Richard, Holderness continues, defies the baronial challenge to his authority with what Holderness says is a "sarcastic remark":

How high a pitch his resolution soars!...
Were he my brother, nay, my kingdom's heir,
As he is but my father's brother's son.
(I.i.109, 116-7)

In Holderness' reading of these lines, King Richard has denied the "ties of blood and kin" which Bolingbroke, being also a descendant of the great King Edward III, asserts. For Holderness, King Richard has asserted that his "sacred blood" is absolved from such partialities in that all are equal before his sovereign authority. Royal absolutism, he concludes, and feudal kinship are placed in sharp opposition (59). Regarding Holderness's latter assertion that Bolingbroke challenges King Richard's authority, I agree; but unlike Holderness, I think that Bolingbroke is not a popular hero who revolts against a despotic king, but a Satanic figure who seeks

his own advancement. (I will explore this idea in Chapter X.) Regarding the latter, I think that Holderness is stretching the text to fit his own interpretation: by mentioning that Bolingbroke is “my father’s brother’s son”, King Richard is, I think, hardly asserting an absolutism. What is remarkable is that Holderness simply omits any analysis of King Richard’s attempted arbitration of the disagreement:

Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be rul’d by me,
Let’s purge this choler without letting blood:
This we prescribe, though no physician;
Deep malice makes too deep incision:
Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed;
Our doctors say this is no month to bleed.
(I.i.152-57)

In the production of the British Broadcasting Company, the court laughs when King Richard says the last line. Perhaps King Richard is being humorous in this deadly serious confrontation, in an attempt to assuage the “wrath kindl’d gentleman” whose minds, being filled with the emotion of anger, cannot possibly receive logic or reason. The primary concern of the speech, however, is King Richard’s desire to “purge this choler without letting blood”. Holinshed depicts a King Richard who repeatedly attempts to reconcile Mowbray and Bolingbroke but does not expound upon the reasons which motivate him to seek the reconciliation. Shakespeare, however, introduces the concept of an ideal king whose primary concern is for the well-being of his kingdom. Shakespeare’s king cannot readily accept the barbaric and murderous traditions with which his countrymen settle their disputes, fearing that the “deep malice” which motivates both knights may lead to the “deep incision” of a limited civil war, as the retainers and supporters of whichever knight is killed seek vengeance and cut the national body to pieces. To avoid these things, he “commands” Mowbray to discard Bolingbroke’s gage and Bolingbroke Mowbray’s, both of whom, offering their reasons, refuse.

Both Rackin and Folland conclude that King Richard is a weakling since he cannot command his noblemen to obey him (Rackin, 263; Folland, 390); but I think that this interchange between royalty and nobility is not simply an issue of submission or rebellion to a royal decree since, operating within this scene, is what Holderness perceives as the contradiction of two medieval philosophies. On the one hand, the king, as “God’s ambassador”, must, according to the principle of divine right, be obeyed unquestioningly; yet, on the other hand, the code of chivalry permits a nobleman to disobey the king if and when he thinks that a particular decree might compromise his “honour”: the two systems, therefore,

irrevocably promote conflict (59-60). Anticipating this contradiction, the king humbles himself and sets aside the office of his kingship, appealing to them both as Richard the man. He does not command a subject, but “calms” a fellow human-being, “bid[ding]” or inviting him to reconsider the implications of combat. Failing to accomplish this end, Richard the man then once again becomes Richard the king and commands them both to appear at Coventry.

We were not born to sue, but to command;
Which since we cannot do to make you friends,
Be ready, as your lives shall answer it,
At Coventry upon Saint Lambert's day.
There shall your swords and lances arbitrate
The swelling difference of your settled hate;
Since we can not atone you, we shall see
Justice design the victor's chivalry.
(I.i.196-203)

According to Folland, King Richard attempts to hide his failure with a wry joke: “Since you will not obey this order,” Folland writes, paraphrasing the king’s reply, “then I will change it and command you to do what you insist on doing” (390). But King Richard clearly states that he is “suing” or entreating, not commanding both Mowbray and Bolingbroke. Moreover Traversi takes issue with the phrase “Which since we cannot do” and concludes that the king is admitting his inability to command (16); but if the line is interpreted in its entirety, as Traversi reluctantly concedes, then the king is merely defining the limitations of the kingship itself, since even a royal command cannot reconcile two knights, both of whom think that the other has affronted his honour. And finally, it is significant that Shakespeare associates the concepts of “atonement” and “justice” with King Richard. Christ, who set aside his kingship in heaven and put on humanity to bring the “atonement” for sin, offers us mercy and forgiveness. Those who reject His offer, as Mowbray and Bolingbroke reject King Richard’s, must face a “justice” of arbitrating “swords and lances”.

I will, for the time being, ignore what I consider to be the slanderous accusations which John of Gaunt makes against the king in scene two, and continue with the theme of King Richard’s statecraft. The tournament in scene three has received much attention by the critics. The high formality which characterizes this event has been another reason to criticize, even ridicule what some consider to be a pompous king. The Lord Marshal asks first Bolingbroke and then Mowbray, both of whom are dressed in arms, to identify themselves and state the reason for their coming, when everyone already knows who they are and why they have come. Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray again of being a “traitor foul and dangerous” (I.iii.

39), and Mowbray retaliates with similar insults. Admittedly such a scene has a certain comical, even carnivalesque effects, as Bergeron notes, upon our modern perception, and this is particularly emphasized in the B.B.C. production when Mowbray contorts his face in the most disturbing of mannerisms as he speaks to Bolingbroke. None of the contestants or spectators, however, thinks it is ridiculous; on the contrary, they think, as does King Richard, that everything is proceeding "according to our law" (I.iii.29). Perhaps Shakespeare is satirising the violent manner by which his ancestors settled their differences, for such feuding eventually led, so Shakespeare asserts in the History Plays, to the deposition of a rightful king and the divine retribution of the War of the Roses.

Because King Richard terminates the contest, however, before it even begins, the critics have heaped much abuse on him. Bergeron says he is a carnival king who drops his warder as if to say, "I'm not really serious; this is but play" (36). Ornstein says it is the "weakling's pleasure" in commanding and humiliating men stronger than himself (110). Rackin, however, sees far more ominous implications in Richard's act. Trial by combat, she says, is based upon the assumption that right makes might; an assumption that underlies the authority of the whole feudal system including the authority of God's anointed king. When King Richard interferes with the trial by combat - as he must since he cannot be sure that Mowbray will win - he interferes with symbolic embodiment of his own authority. By throwing down the warder, Rackin concludes, he attacks the source of his own authority (264). It is undoubtedly true that the principle of right makes might was fundamental to the feudal system, but it was not, as Rackin implies, the basis of feudalism. On the contrary, a higher principle, that of order and degree, supersedes what King Richard calls the "rival-hating envy" (I.ii.131) of knightly tournaments. To Bolingbroke, Mowbray and the rest of the noblemen whom the Dauphin calls the "wild and savage stock" (*Henry V*, III.v.7), an enlightened king explains the reason for his decision, teaching their rude minds about a principle which is higher than that of "right makes might".

Draw near,
 And list what with our council we have done.
 For that our kingdom's earth should not be soil'd
 With that dear blood which it hath fostered;
 And for our eyes do hate the dire aspect
 Of civil wounds plough'd up with neighbours' sword,
 And for we think the eagle-winged pride
 Of sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts,
 With rival-hating envy, set on you
 To wake our peace, which in our country's cradle
 Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep;

Which so rous'd u with boist'rous untun'd drums,
With harsh-resounding trumpets' dreadful bray,
And grating shock of wrathful iron arms,
Might from our quiet confines fright fair peace,
And make us wade even in our kindred's blood.
(I.iii.123-138)

Holderness asserts that this speech is an "impressive homily" against civil war (62). Agreeing with this, I think that Shakespeare, again deviating from the *Chronicles* which offer no explanation for the royal intervention, creates the ideal king whose concern for his kingdom is such that he perceives it as a "cradle" in which peace "draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep". To protect the frail and delicate condition of his kingdom's civil concord, the king intervenes and cancels the tournament, fearing the outcome of what may induce not only more "rival-hating envy", but the "boist'rous untun'd drums" of a baronial war. The king is concerned about such things even before the tournament begins, saying to Bolingbroke, "Farewell, my blood, which if today thou shed,/Lament we may, but not revenge thee dead" (I.iii.57-8). Afterwards, the king banishes both of the contestants, Bolingbroke for ten, then six years, and Mowbray for life. For Holderness, Richard is an absolutist who is clearly attempting not just to banish two quarrelling earls, but to dismantle the very structures of feudal power itself (63). I disagree, thinking that the issue here is not "feudalism", but Henry Bolingbroke who poses a threat not only to the stability of the kingdom, but to the throne of the king himself. That Bolingbroke aspires to the crown even in I.iii. will be discussed in Chapter X; and Gaunt's allegation of murder in I.ii. which, if true, tends to lessen the image of a peace-loving king who banishes a disruptive noble, and promotes one of a guilty king who banishes his accuser, will be analysed in Chapter III. The king's final action before the rebellion, namely the confiscation of Gaunt's estate in II.i., will be analysed in Chapter VII.

I.iv. is not a scene which immediately strengthens my interpretation of King Richard; instead it seems to advance Holderness's thesis of not a saintly, but a tyrannical king who is at once unscrupulous, extravagant, arrogant and sinister: I am surprised that Holderness omits a discussion of it. I think I would be hardpressed to present the king, as he is portrayed in this scene, in a very favourable light, so I will be content to neutralize what may be our initially unfavourable opinion of him. Firstly, King Richard appears to be unscrupulous when he says, "He [Bolingbroke] is our cousin, cousin; but 'tis doubt,/When time shall call him home from banishment" (I.iv.20-1). Is the king saying that Bolingbroke's six year sentence is actually for life? If yes, then does that imply that he is indeed guilty of the murder of Gloucester, since he thinks that it is necessary

to banish the man who has vowed to “chastise” the murderer? These lines may indeed raise such questions, but we must conclude in the final analysis, as does King Richard, that “’tis doubt”. Secondly, the king seems to be arrogant when he refers to his subjects as “slaves” and “poor craftsmen”, but this must be read in conjunction with V.v. where he refers to the groom of the stables as a “noble peer” (V.v.67). (Admittedly he is no longer king in Act Five, but would his prejudicial mentality, if he ever had one, have changed so suddenly?) And we should also heed Tillyard who says that the differentiation between the classes in Elizabethan England was such that commoners were considered by the nobility to be subhuman and beast-like slaves (277). Thirdly, the king appears to be extravagant when he talks of the “liberal largess” of his court and especially the “blank charters”, but I will address this issue in Chapter VI. And finally, regarding a character who says, “Now put it, God, in the physician’s mind/To help him to his grave immediately!” (I.iv.59-60), I think that the king is portrayed as a villain who not only contemplates murder but speaks of it in terms which are “appallingly blasphemous” (Cochrane). Moreover, Shakespeare suggests that King Richard considers murdering Gaunt not by his own hand but by the hand of another agency. Did the king also instigate the murder of Gloucester by the hand of Mowbray? IV.i. is not irrefutable “proof” that King Richard cannot be cast as a type of Christ, but it is an indication that Shakespeare has created not a static, but a complicated character who cannot be “forced” into any one particular pattern of interpretation.

To sum up the characterization of King Richard in Act One, I think that it is largely, but not absolutely, favourable. Although Bergeron advances a disturbing characterization of a carnival king and Holderness one of a tyrant, Shakespeare has also written another and I think stronger characterization of King Richard: that of a shrewd king who cherishes, advances and preserves above all else, a civil peace within his kingdom. In this regard, Shakespeare establishes a “prince of peace” whose coming deposition is a criminal and regrettable violation of the divine right of kings.

CHAPTER III

THE MURDERER-KING

Throughout the tragedy of *Richard II*, it is suggested by various characters that King Richard conducts himself in such an outrageous and even criminal manner that he is unfit to be king. The principal accusation is one of murder which is brought against the king by John of Gaunt who, in speaking with the widow of his brother Gloucester, says, "God's substitute,/His deputy anointed in His sight,/Hath caus'd his [Gloucester's] death" (I.ii.37-8). The accusation is again repeated when the dying Gaunt says to the king that he has "tapp'd out and drunkenly carous'd" (II.i.127) the blood of king Edward's son. Gaunt's accusation is apparently strengthened when Edmund of Langley who is also the king's uncle, accuses his nephew of the same murder. In listing a series of what he believes to be King Richard's "crimes", York mentions firstly "Gloucester's death" (II.i.165). The king, then, who is initially presented by Shakespeare as a competent leader, is accused by two apparently respectable and influential noblemen of being a murderer. Holinshed clearly states that the historical king plotted the murder of Gloucester, but Shakespeare refrains from such a definitive and unfavourable judgment of King Richard II, never presenting him, as he does King Richard III, in a scene in which he soliloquizes on or plots his murderous intentions. Instead he chooses to present this issue indirectly, through the testimony of two "witnesses"; but does the dramatist intend us to indiscriminately receive their accusations, or does he invite us to scrutinize the accusers themselves?

GAUNT THE ACCUSER

John of Gaunt is a genuinely patriotic man who praises his country as being "this other Eden" (II.i.42) and "this precious stone set in the silver sea" (II.i.46). Moreover, he is a religious man (and hence honest and reliable) who accepts the doctrines of the Roman church, speaking favourably of "blessed Mary's son" (II.i.56). But Shakespeare presents other, generally unfavourable aspects of his characterization which are ignored or unnoticed by Holderness and other critics. Firstly, it should be noted that Gaunt is an undiscerning man who cannot understand the character or the thinking of those men with whom he associates. Speaking to his own son who, upon his banishment, is so intently calculating his plan to bear arms against the king that he is oblivious to the greetings of the other noblemen, Gaunt asks naively, "O, to what purpose dost thou hoard thy words,/That thou return'st no greeting to thy friends?" (I.iii.253-4). For those

critics who think that Shakespeare created from the very beginning of the play a Machiavellian character or something worse in Bolingbroke, Gaunt's question is absurdly comical. Moreover, Gaunt also fails to discern the character of King Richard even after giving him a "lifetime" of counsel. Just before he dies, Gaunt is resolved to "breathe [his] last/In wholesome counsel to his [Richard's] unstaid youth" (II.i.1-2). Regardless of Gaunt's intention to impart "wholesome counsel" (which in itself has a certain ridiculous connotation, since "counsel" is usually associated with such terms as "wise" or "good") to the king, the rebuking or correcting of the "Lord's anointed" is a dangerous business: Carlisle asks, "What subject can give sentence on his king?" (IV.i.121), and concludes that those who do so have committed a deed which is "heinous, black, [and] obscene" (IV.i.131). Clearly, Bolingbroke understands the implications of such a reckless course of action, never once directly accusing the king of the murder of Gloucester although he thinks that he is implicated; instead he accuses the king indirectly through Mowbray. (I will reveal Bolingbroke's duplicity in this and other instances in Chapter X.)

York also clearly understands the serious risks involved in criticising the king and warns his brother on three occasions (II.i.3,17,29) to desist from such folly; but seeing that Gaunt is resolved to take this risk, he pleads, "The king is come, deal mildly with his youth,/For young hot coals being rag'd do rage the more" (II.i.69-70). Gaunt, unfortunately, dismisses this advice which is the actual "wholesome counsel" and recklessly rebukes the king in the false assurance that the counsel of dying men is universally heeded: "O, but they say," he assures York, "the tongues of dying men/Enforce attention like deep harmony" (II.i.5-6). It is significant that Gaunt is willing to jeopardize not only his son's inheritance, but his very life, not on a principle of human nature which he in his supposed wisdom has observed or learnt, but on hearsay, on what "they say". Shakespeare is suggesting that Gaunt is not a man of resolution who acts in accordance with his own judgment and discretion, but a man of irresolution who is easily persuaded, even manipulated by the opinions of other. This second shortcoming of Gaunt's character is revealed also when he, lamenting his son's banishment of which he "a party-verdict gave" (I.iii.234), complains to King Richard, saying that he compelled him to judge his son in a manner which was contrary to his own will: "You urg'd me as a judge, but I had rather/You would have bid me argue like a father" (I.iii.237-8). And again he says, "But you gave leave to my unwilling tongue/Against my will to do myself this wrong" (I.iii.245-6). Even though Gaunt believes that his part in the banishment of his son is "wrong", he still consents. Shakespeare comically emphasizes the

discrepancies within Gaunt's character when he, apparently speaking of the king, is made to say that

His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
For violent fires soon burn out themselves;
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short.

(II.i.33-5)

Ironically Gaunt speaks of himself since his rebuke of the king is not a small "shower" of mild, staid advice, but a "rash, fierce blaze of riot". Consequently he provokes the king's displeasure and forfeits his estate, his life only being spared because he is so near to death.

Undiscerning and irresolute, this vulnerable old man lives, not as he so wishes and dreams, in a nation renowned for "Christian service and true chivalry" (II.i.54), but in one corrupted with treachery, deceit and murderous hatred. Gaunt is a man who, confronted with what Richard will later describe as an "all-hating world" (V.v.66), has a "gnarling sorrow" which he can only assuage with his dreams. Speaking to an only recently banished Bolingbroke, he advises him to think in a manner which he himself apparently practices:

Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
To lie that way thou go'st, not when thou com'st:
Suppose the singing birds musicians,
The grass whereon thou tread'st the presence strew'd
The flowers fair ladies, and thy steps no more
Than a delightful measure or a dance;
For gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite
The man that mocks at it and sets it light.

(I.iii.286-93)

One can hardly criticise Gaunt for creating his own world of "musicians", "fair ladies" and "dance", when one considers the characters with whom he associates. The play begins with two "chivalrous" knights exchanging the most heinous of insults: Bolingbroke exclaims, "With a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat" (I.i.44), and Mowbray retaliates, retorting, "I do defy him, and I spit at him,/ Call him a slanderous coward, and a villain" (I.i.60-1). At Coventry, a similar dialogue is spoken as the pair prepare to kill each other, and in Westminster Hall, with the usurping Bolingbroke presiding, the noblemen accuse one another of treachery: "Fitzwater, thou art damn'd to hell for this" (IV.i.43), Aumerle threatens.

But such ill-will between the noblemen of King Richard's court is not always so openly manifested. Thomas Mowbray reveals that he had once laid an "ambush" (I.i.137) for the life of Gaunt himself. What would have compelled Mowbray, whose integrity is praised by most of the characters in the tetralogy, to have plotted

a “trespass that doth vex [his] grieved soul” (I.i.138)? What had Gaunt said or done that even Mowbray had once desired to kill him? King Richard says of the Duke of Norfolk:

What doth our cousin lay to Mowbray’s charge?
It must be great that can inherit us
So much as of a thought of ill in him
(I.i.84-6)

Mowbray says of himself:

However God or fortune cast my lot,
There lives or dies, true to King Richard’s throne,
A loyal, just and upright gentleman.
(I.iii.85-7)

And even Bolingbroke, who declares that Mowbray is “his enemy”, intends to repeal his banishment and restore his property to him, rewarding him perhaps, for his integrity. But Carlisle’s glowing account of Mowbray the crusader is unsurpassed:

Many a time hath banish’d Norfolk fought
For Jesu Christ in glorious Christian field,
Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross
Against black pagans, Turks, and Saracens,
And toil’d with works of war, retir’d himself
To Italy, and there at Venice gave
His body to that pleasant country’s earth,
And his **pure soul** unto his captain Christ,
Under whose colours he had fought so long.
(IV.i.92-100)

And even Bolingbroke says, “Sweet peace conduct his sweet soul to the bosom/Of good old Abraham!” (IV.i.103-4). Yet the characterisation of even Mowbray is not static or simplistic, being complicated by another consideration: if Bolingbroke’s accusations against Mowbray in I.i. are true (which I think they are not) then Mowbray is only a “pure” or “sweet” soul *after* he expiates his sins killing “black pagans”. Further suspicion is added to Mowbray’s characterisation when Westmoreland speaks to Lord Mowbray of his “noble and right-well remembered father” (2 *Henry IV*, IV.i.112), and then seems to contradict himself when he says:

All the country in a general voice
Cried hate upon him; and all the their prayers and love
Were set upon Hereford, whom they doted on
And bless’d and grac’d indeed, more than the king.
(2 *Henry IV*, IV.i.136-9)

Of course, Westmoreland denounces Norfolk only after Mowbray claims that, if the king had not intervened, his father would have killed the traitorous Bolingbroke. Compelled to justify the usurpation, Westmoreland inordinately praises Bolingbroke as a saintly, popular hero, while Mowbray, in a similar but opposite exaggeration, is vilified or more specifically, slandered. Although Mowbray's characterisation clearly has certain complexities and complications, the weight of the testimonial evidence indicates a character of a general moral integrity. If such a man was at one time an enemy of Gaunt, then Gaunt's characterization is, as I am arguing, more complex than is generally acknowledged.

Aumerle also participates in a conspiracy which is uncovered by his father, when he takes a parchment from his coatpocket which discloses the intention of a dozen "traitors", of whom Aumerle is one, to kill the new king at Oxford. During the discussion that precedes the opening of this secret document, York asks his wife, "What doth he with a bond/That he is bound to?" (V.ii.67-8). York suspects that he has a "bond" or a sealed document because he is "bound" by an oath of writing to kill the king. Curiously John of Gaunt also mentions a mysterious document with "inky blots and rotten parchment bonds" (II.i.64). Altick suggests that the image of a dark blot upon fair parchment symbolizes the disorder and chaos within King Richard's England (265). But Gaunt does not talk about "parchment" but "parchment bonds" which suggest not a metaphor, but an actual document which, being sealed with "bonds", contains a secret of considerable importance. Is Gaunt talking about a document which had "bound" a certain number of English nobles, himself included, to assassinate the Duke of Gloucester, just as York talks about the document which he fears has "bound" Aumerle to kill King Henry IV? Gaunt says:

That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
How happy then were my ensuing death!
(II.i. 65-8)

Gaunt clearly mentions the existence of a scandal in which not just King Richard but "England" is involved. In Gaunt's mind, as in the mind of all English noblemen, England is symbolized or represented not by "slaves" (I.iv. 27) and "poor craftsmen" (I.iv.28) who are at the bottom of the chain of being, but by chivalrous and crusading knights, of whom he is one. England (or the English knights), Gaunt confesses, has made a "conquest" of itself or one of its own, perhaps the Duke of Gloucester.

Shakespeare increases our suspicion of Gaunt when he mentions the “part I had in Woodstock’s blood” (I.ii.1.). An ambiguous statement, it is translated by Ure to mean that Gaunt is referring to his blood-relationship to Woodstock (16), but from another viewpoint, it may imply that Gaunt had a “part” or an involvement of some kind in the death of Gloucester. Likewise, the Duchess of Gloucester says to Gaunt that in “suff’ring thus thy brother to be slaught’red,/Thou showest the naked pathway to thy life” (I.ii.30-1). Another ambiguous statement, it means in one sense that if Gaunt does not avenge Gloucester’s murder, then those who killed Gloucester will kill him also; but in the literal sense, the Duchess is saying that because Gaunt allowed his brother to be slaughtered, then those who killed Gloucester will kill him also. Gaunt assures his passionate sister-in-law that the reason why he will not placate her and heed her pleas for revenge is because he is a religious man who honours God and “His minister” (I.ii.40), even if the former is guilty of murder; but perhaps the actual reason why he resists her is because he himself had participated in the murderous conspiracy.

That certain nobles had assembled to conspire to assassinate Gloucester is an issue which is settled beyond a reasonable doubt in the Parliament scene (just before the depositional ceremony) of IV.i. Presiding, Bolingbroke says:

Call forth Bagot.
 Now, Bagot, freely speak thy mind:
 What thou dost know of noble Gloucester’s death,
 Who wrought it with the king, and who perform’d
 The bloody office of his timeless end.
(IV.i.1-5)

Although Bolingbroke clearly mentions the existence of a conspiracy in which the king was involved, we should not unreservedly accept this allegation because the establishment of a royal conspiracy is fundamental to the justification of his rebellion. Moreover it should be noted that the allegation itself is ambiguous: “Who wrought it with the king” is a line which has prompted Ure to present no less than three separate interpretations. The first is: who worked it with the king? The second: who worked upon the king so that the murder was effected? And finally: who joined with the king in effecting the murder? (125). Why does Bolingbroke obscure and not emphasize King Richard’s involvement in the killing when, as I have stated previously, such an involvement is allegedly the reason why he violates his divine right? Why does not Bolingbroke clearly say, as did his father, that King Richard “hath caus’d his death”? We recall that Bolingbroke has said that Gloucester’s blood, like “sacrificing Abel’s”, cries to him for “justice and rough chastisement”. Perhaps Bolingbroke has a sincere desire to identify and “chastise”

that nobleman who *actually* “caus’d” Gloucester’s death, and now that he is in a position to do so, he only implicates King Richard for the sake of policy.

It is a curious thing that Bolingbroke “calls forth” Bagot. Why has not Bolingbroke executed him as he did the other counsellors of the king, Bushy and Green? Why, having specifically sworn to “weed and pluck away” (II.iii.166) both Bushy and Bagot, whom he calls the “caterpillars of the common wealth” (II.iii.165), has he spared only the former? Bolingbroke has done so because Bagot can identify the one who “wrought” the death of Gloucester! Speaking to Aumerle, he says:

In that dead time when Gloucester’s death was plotted,
I heard you say, “Is not my arm of length,
That reacheth from the restful English court
As far as Calais, to mine uncle’s head?”

(IV.i.10-13)

Besides accusing Aumerle of the murder, Bagot also clearly attests to the existence of a conspiracy of certain nobles to kill Gloucester; and we conclude from this revelation that the conspirators included Bagot, Aumerle and the one to whom Aumerle spoke the question that Bagot heard: perhaps Green or even Gaunt. It is significant that when Bagot is given permission to “freely speak [his] mind”, he does not implicate the king in the conspiracy, but speaks only and rather vaguely of the time “when Gloucester’s death was plotted”. Is Bagot passively defending the king’s honour? Is Bagot suggesting that the king was, in fact, not involved? Such a conclusion is supported by Lord Fitzwater who says to Aumerle:

By that fair sun which shows me where thou stand’st,
I heard thee say, and vauntingly thou spak’st it,
That thou wert cause of noble Gloucester’s death.

(IV.i.35-7)

When Fitzwater says that Aumerle was the “cause” of Gloucester’s death, he contradicts Gaunt’s accusation that King Richard “caus’d” or was the cause of it. Indeed, Fitzwater’s accusation in conjunction with Bagot’s, clearly indicates that Aumerle, and not King Richard, plotted and executed the murder! Of course, the Duke of Surrey, whose testimony, being that of an elder statesman, has considerable weight, says that Fitzwater is a liar, but Fitzwater retaliates with an even bolder accusation:

Besides, I heard the banish’d Norfolk say,
That thou, Aumerle, didst send two of thy men
To execute the noble duke at Calais.

(IV.i.80-2)

In this accusation, Aumerle is portrayed as the mastermind of the plot, since he “didst send” two of “[his] men”, not the king’s, to implement a plan which apparently is of his own devising. Moreover it is significant that the name of “Norfolk” is associated with yet another conspiracy. If Mowbray is and has always been a “pure soul”, would not his testimony be irrefutable proof of Aumerle’s guilt? Of course, even if Mowbray’s integrity and character can be established without question, a question is raised: did Mowbray actually say the things that Fitzwater alleges? Surrey has called Fitzwater “Dishonourable boy” (IV.i.65), undermining his credibility, but this epithet is spoken only in connection with Fitzwater’s first claim that he himself heard Aumerle confess to the killing. Aumerle himself never doubts that Norfolk has said what Fitzwater attests, only resorting to a tactic which further intensifies our suspicions of his guilt: calling even the “pure soul” a liar, he challenges him to combat.

Is Aumerle the “cause” of Gloucester’s death? Although three “witnesses” allege that he is, it should be noted that the “witnesses” themselves have certain character defects which may compromise their testimony. After accusing Aumerle of the murder, Bagot then says:

Amongst much other talk, that very time,
I heard you say that you had rather refuse
The offer of an hundred thousand crowns
Than Bolingbroke’s return to England;
Adding withal, how blest this land would be
In this your cousin’s death.

(IV.i.14-9)

Bagot alleges that in “that very time” in which Aumerle plotted Gloucester’s murder, he also denounced Bolingbroke who was in exile; but surely this new allegation is false since Gloucester had been killed well before Bolingbroke even challenged Mowbray to combat! Furthermore, it is suspicious that Bagot, after being grievously insulted and then challenged by Aumerle, obeys Bolingbroke who commands him, saying, “Bagot, forbear; thou shalt not take it up” (IV.i.30). We recall that when King Richard commands Bolingbroke to “throw down” Mowbray’s gage after Mowbray rubbishes his “honour”, he says, “O, God defend my soul from such deep sin!” (I.i.187). But Bagot commits this very “sin” without comment or question; why? It may be that Bagot understands that he is permitted to live only if he speaks and does those things which Bolingbroke commands, and if this is so, then Bolingbroke, not Bagot, is accusing Aumerle of Gloucester’s murder. Why or if Bolingbroke is doing this however, is a question which Shakespeare never addresses in these plays.

plotted the assassination of his uncle?) And finally, after witnessing the depositional ceremony, Aumerle is the one who first suggests to the Abbot and the Bishop the idea of a conspiracy:

You holy clergymen, is there no plot
To rid the realm of this pernicious blot?
(IV.i.324-5)

Apart from revealing a rather unscrupulous part of Aumerle's character, these lines also reveal another, admirable part of it: namely a zealous fidelity to the king's cause. Such a conviction may also be evidence that Aumerle plotted Gloucester's death, since Gloucester himself may have posed a threat to the well-being of not only King Richard's throne, but his person as well. Holinshed writes that the historical Gloucester was a man "fierce of nature, hastie, wilfull, and giuen more to war than to peace: and in this greatlie to be discommended, that he was euer repining against the King in all things, whatsoeuer he wished to haue forward" (qtd. in Boswell, 83). Shakespeare, however, refrains from such judgments, never explicitly maligning Gloucester's integrity through any of the other characters in the play. He does suggest, though, that Gloucester was not universally esteemed: Gloucester's own widow is generally indifferent towards her deceased husband, talking not about his personal attributes, but only about his royal lineage. Although she refers to him briefly as "my dear lord" (I.ii.16) this is not an expression of tenderness or endearment. Holderness contends that the female characters in *Richard II* are portrayed as being inferior to the male characters: Queen Isabella laments excessively, the Duchess of York pleads irrationally and the Duchess of Gloucester is incapable of exacting her own vengeance on her husband's murderer. Women are redeemed in this play, Holderness contends, by their relationship or marriage to a prominent male character. When Gloucester is murdered, the duchess, being without a male covering, becomes an "empty hollowness" (I.ii.59). To regain her self-esteem, she demands vengeance which is the safeguard of a nobleman's honour, scorning Christian submission as the natural subjection of the "mean" man (79-80). When Gaunt denies her, she is "desolate" and longs for death, probably suicide.

Desolate, desolate will I hence and die:
The last leave of thee takes my weeping eye.
(I.ii.73-4)

That the Duchess refers to Gloucester as "my dear lord" does not indicate that she considers him to have been a gentlemanly and admirable character. He is only

“dear” in the sense that being her husband and of royal lineage, he defined her identity which is “[her] life” (I.ii.16).

He probably was a disagreeable character as even Gaunt suggests that his assassination may not have been “wrong”, saying that King Richard

Hath caus'd his death, the which **if wrongfully**,
Let heaven revenge.

(I.ii.39-40)

What had Gloucester done that even Gaunt, a patriotic and religious man, is tempted to condone his assassination? More suspicion is added to Gloucester's ambivalent characterization when Gaunt, speaking to King Richard, says that he was a “plain well-meaning soul” (II.i.128), suggesting that Gloucester had committed some questionable deed or deeds which Gaunt naively hopes were done with good intentions. I think that it is also strongly suggested, particularly by the previous example, that Gaunt is wavering, unable to fully condemn or justify his brother. Holderness, of course, perceives Gaunt's conflict not in terms of a man attempting to be reconciled to his apparently offensive brother, as I have suggested, but in terms of a man who is struggling to define the limitations of feudal rights and the royal prerogative. Gaunt, Holderness argues, uncertainly decides that even the murder of a fellow nobleman by the king does not constitute the grounds on which to resist “[God's] minister” (61-2). In either interpretation, Shakespeare insinuates that Aumerle had a motive to kill Gloucester.

The issue, of course, is not whether Aumerle is Gloucester's killer since a definitive conclusion regarding either his guilt or innocence cannot be ascertained from the text alone. The issue now is whether the audience can unflinchingly receive Gaunt's testimony. Indeed, Shakespeare has deliberately exposed the audience to the testimony of three “witnesses” who allegedly “heard” Aumerle boasting of his intention or his decision to kill Gloucester. The discerning reader, attempting to make a rational judgment on this issue, must now ask him or herself: what is the source of Gaunt's allegation; upon what evidence does Gaunt decide that King Richard is the killer? Shakespeare denies such information to the reader, and so we must either accept or reject Gaunt's accusation on the basis of his character, and a bit of detective work.

That a group of nobles had at one time conspired to kill Gloucester is, based on the testimony of Bagot and even Bolingbroke, as well as Gaunt's comments which I have previously cited, very likely. That the royal advisers were involved in this meeting also seems likely when we again consider Bagot's testimony, as well as Aumerle's ambition to instigate the assassination of another nobleman, the

“pernicious blot”. If King Richard’s inner circle of advisers were planning such an enterprise, is it possible that Gaunt, who is the senior member of King Richard’s court, who gave his “life’s counsel” (II.i.15) to the king, was ignorant of it? When Mowbray confesses to Gaunt that he had laid an “ambush” (I.i.137) for his life, it is unclear whether Mowbray voluntarily disclosed his intentions to Gaunt or whether Gaunt himself had uncovered the plot; but certainly the former is suggested. I think that the conspirators, knowing that Gaunt was wavering in his fraternal affections towards Gloucester, may even have invited him to take the “sacrament”, or sign the parchment which, judging from the Aumerle-conspiracy, seems to have been a requirement of any conspiracy, since Gaunt’s consent, being that of Gloucester’s own brother and also that of a son of the great king, Edward III, would have added a considerable degree of legitimacy to the enterprise.

We know that an irresolute Gaunt is persuaded “against his will” to banish his son; was he persuaded also “against his will” to condone the assassination of his brother? He laments bitterly about a mysterious “scandal” and the “rotten parchment bonds”, as I have said previously. Perhaps Gaunt, being a man of a tender and religious conscience, now regrets his decision to join the conspiracy, and in a particularly vindictive mindframe, displaces his guilt upon the one whom he thinks is ultimately responsible for Gloucester’s demise:

O, had thy grandsire with a prophet’s eye
 Seen how his son’s son should destroy his sons,
 From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame,
 Deposing thee before thou wert possess’d,
 Which art possess’d now to depose thyself.
(II.i.104-8)

Gaunt is so distraught that he recklessly hazards his life by not only telling the king that he “destroyed” or murdered one of King Edward’s sons, presumably the Duke of Gloucester; but by insulting him grievously, saying that he should not just be deposed, but that he should be deposed by King Edward III himself whom the Duchess of Gloucester says is the “most royal root” (I.ii.18) and the source of England’s “sacred blood” (I.ii.17) which is, she says, a “precious liquor” (I.ii.19). Enraged, the king responds, saying that he is a “lunatic lean-witted fool” (II.i.115). Perhaps the king’s epithet is excessive and even unwarranted since no other character expressly describes John of Gaunt in this manner. But it is significant that the king, upon hearing Gaunt’s accusation, does not then address his integrity, but his intelligence, saying that he is a “fool” to advance what he says is a “frozen (or lifeless or erroneous) admonition” (II.i.117). We recall that in IV.i. every nobleman who is accused, responds by addressing the moral, not the intellectual

character of his accuser. Fitzwater, for example, says simply, "Surrey, thou liest" (IV.i.64). Is the king suggesting that Gaunt foolishly believes and advances some slanderous accusation which one of his enemies has concocted? Perhaps Gaunt, in his inability to discern the "eagle-winged pride" (I.iii.129) and "rival-hating envy" (I.iii.131) of his fellow noblemen, had attended a meeting similar to the once depicted in IV.i. and heard Bolingbroke or Northumberland associate the king's name with the assassination. Certainly Northumberland has persuaded other noblemen to turn against the king, telling Ross and Willoughby that King Richard is a "most degenerate king" (II.i.262), and subtly encouraging them to join the rebel army at Ravenspurgh. Moreover, Gaunt has previously demonstrated a propensity to act and think in accordance with what others say, as I have already noted: he is convinced, yet erroneously, that "the tongues of dying men/Enforce attention like deep harmony", only because he has heard that "they say" so. Just before his death, Gaunt finally reveals the source of knowledge which compels him to accuse the king:

My brother Gloucester, plain well-meaning soul,
Whom fair befall in heaven 'mongst happy souls!
May be a precedent and witness good
That thou respect'st not spilling Edward's blood.
(II.i.128-131)

Whereas Bagot, Fitzwater and Mowbray claim to be eyewitnesses who have "heard" Aumerle incriminate himself, Gaunt never makes such a claim about himself, never asserting that he "heard" King Richard implicate himself in the murder. Instead he says that his "witness good" is Gloucester himself who is dead! Of course, such testimony can not possibly be admitted in a court of law and I wonder if Shakespeare himself is not subtly, even comically exposing the deficiencies of Gaunt's character, as well as his testimony. Certainly Gaunt, who is only moments away from death, would have the inclination to finally identify the source which convinces him, to the point of hazarding his life and his property, of King Richard's guilt, but alas, he does not, dying instead with such knowledge (or ignorance). And so, when formulating a final assessment of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, we may do well to remember the words of King Richard: "lunatic lean-witted fool".

As early as I.ii., Gaunt attempts to colour our thinking of King Richard, saying that he "hath caus'd his [Gloucester's] death". Initially, his testimony is received since he appears to be, as King Richard himself declares, "time-honoured Lancaster" (I.i.1): a character whose credibility is apparently founded upon the principles of patriotism, chivalry and medieval Christianity. But ultimately

however, it must be questioned and even dismissed, since his characterisation is also tainted with certain idiosyncrasies. Gaunt is not simply the static choral figure that Ure advocates, whose testimony is to be received "unreservedly" (lxvi); but a complex, somewhat unstable character whose vilification of King Richard may arise from his own personal shortcomings and failures.

YORK THE ACCUSER

The Duke of York also accuses King Richard of the murder of Gloucester. York, like Gaunt, is a complex character who certainly is not the "sheer immaculate and silver fountain" (V.iii.61) that Bolingbroke says that he is; neither is he simply another choric voice of the old values, who reluctantly succumbs to the necessity of usurpation. At worst he is a ridiculous, senile, old man whose every word should be laughingly disregarded, and at best, an indecisive and troubled man whose inability or unwillingness to fulfil the martial requirements of his knighthood cause him to be envious of those who can. York is preoccupied with the military exploits of his famous elder brother who was King Richard's father, the Black Prince. He says to King Richard in Ely House:

In war was never lion rag'd more fierce,
In peace was never gentle lamb more mild,
Than was that young and princely gentleman.
(II.i.173-5)

In the B.B.C. production, King Richard sighs and paces the floor, seldom looking into the face of his uncle as he talks about the Prince of Wales: the obvious implication is that York has said this kind of thing many times beforehand. When York meets Bolingbroke in Gloucestershire he tells him also about the Black Prince, saying to our general surprise, that he "Rescued the Black Prince, that young Mars of men,/From forth the ranks of many thousand French" (II.iii.100-1). This is certainly a tall tale which indicates that York is fantasizing about the military prowess that he so desires but cannot attain. He says to Bolingbroke:

Well, well, I see the issue of these arms.
I cannot mend it, I must needs confess,
Because my power is weak and all ill left.
(II.iii.152-4)

York says that he will not defend the kingdom of King Richard because he can "see" that Bolingbroke's army is too strong. Precisely what is meant by the phrase "the issue of these arms" is unknown: he may be referring to the abundance or the excellence of the armaments of the army, namely the swords, shields and horses.

Whatever it means, how, since the two men are meeting in the darkness of night, can York "see" them? York then says, "I cannot mend it.../Because my power is weak". On the one hand, we conclude that York is saying that his own army is "weak", but does not Shakespeare also allow us to conclude that York is subtly confessing to the "weakness" of his own personal courage? (Shakespeare deliberately creates the ambiguity when he wrote the pronoun "it".) York has waffled. Previously he has said that the "palsy" (II.iii.103) in his arm hinders him from fighting, but this excuse is improbable since in Act Five, he rides a horse with such dexterity and horsemanship that he arrives at Windsor Castle before his hysterical wife, who is also racing to the king. While speaking to the queen, York says that not his army, nor his palsy, but his old age is the cause of his inaction. The latter two reasons can be dismissed with a chuckle, but the former poses a question: with what number of soldiers does the Lord Governor of England meet the rebels on that momentous night in the hills of Gloucestershire? And likewise, what number of soldiers does Bolingbroke command?

I will answer the latter question first because the Earl of Northumberland, Bolingbroke's chief ally, is the only character in the play who actually defines the size of either army. He tells two other lords that Bolingbroke has landed on the northern coast of England with only "three thousand men of war" (II.i.286). We know that Northumberland, Lord Ross and Lord Willoughby join him at Coventry, but what we don't know is the size of the armies that they bring with them when they come, or whether any of them even have an army to bring at all. Green tells the Queen that the Earl of Worcester and "all the household servants" (II.ii.60) have gone to join Bolingbroke. This is a minor piece of comedy which is intensified when we learn in the next scene that they have gone to the wrong place. Sir Stephen Scroop alarms the king when he tells him that Bolingbroke is "covering your fearful land/With hard bright steel, and hearts harder than steel" (III.ii.110-111); yet his description of this "army" has the same comic theme as that of the "fleeing servants":

White beards have arm'd their thin and hairless scalps
 Against thy majesty; boys, with women's voices,
 Strive to speak big, and clap their female joints
 In stiff unwieldy arms against thy crown.
 (III.ii.112-115)

Does Bolingbroke's army consist of old men, boys, household servants and only three thousand soldiers? We may assume that Northumberland has brought soldiers for Bolingbroke because he certainly brings them against him when he becomes king; but then again such an assumption may be false since it is equally

likely that Northumberland's, as well as Ross's and Willoughby's personal fortunes are only realized after they join Bolingbroke, in which case neither of them can possibly have a significant power because neither of them has the means to support an army. Bolingbroke allures Ross and Willoughby to his side by promising them riches which they apparently don't have:

All my treasury
Is yet but unfelt thanks, which more enrich'd
Shall be your love and labour's recompense
(II.iii.60-2)

We can only conclude with reasonable certainty then, that Bolingbroke has an army of at least three thousand men when he meets York on that fateful night.

With regard to the royalist forces, Sir John Bushy declares, "For us to levy power/Proportionable to the enemy/Is all impossible" (II.ii.123-5). Bushy is not a hardened soldier, like Hotspur, who enjoys the thrill of battle; instead he is a young courtier studied in the disciplines of philosophy and rhetoric. He says to the queen, "Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,/Which shows like a grief itself, but it is not so" (II.ii.14-5). Bushy is not concerned with the "substance" of practical affairs, but with the "shadows" of profound and academic topics. But his luxurious academic world is disturbed when Green brings word of the rebellion. Initially he is courageous, saying that the rebels are "revolted faction traitors" (II.ii.57), but he becomes shaken and fearful after listening to an indecisive and pessimistic York, the lord governor of England, desperately appraise the situation:

God for his mercy! what a tide of woes
Comes rushing on this woeful land at once!
I know not what to do.
(II.ii.98-100)

After York leaves, he assumes that the rebel forces are greater than the king's, even though neither Green nor York spoke of such intelligence; and he also assumes irrationally that there is a great civil uprising in which the "hateful commons...will.../...like curs....tear [them] all to pieces" (II.ii.138-9). He undoubtedly agrees with Green who wildly imagines that "thousands" (II.ii.147) of the royalist soldiers will desert York and join Bolingbroke. (It is interesting that Green speaks of "thousands" of royalist soldiers; is this also an exaggeration or a fact?) The young, immature philosopher, terrified of the prospect of warfare, is exaggerating wildly; his military assessments of Bolingbroke's army should be doubted seriously.

It is true that York says his “power is weak” when he confronts Bolingbroke at Coventry, but York is waffling when he says this because at Windsor Castle he fusses about many things, but never about the weakness of his military power. On two occasions he commands Bushy, Green and Bagot to “go muster up [their] men” (II.ii.108,118), as he rants about his need for money and his own inability to “order these affairs” (II.ii.109). The Duke of Aumerle knows that York commands a powerful army, saying to the king on the coast of Wales:

My father hath a power; inquire of him,
And learn to make a body of a limb.
(III.ii.186-7)

Shakespeare gives us another clue: York’s power is just a “limb” or a part of the king’s total force which initially included the Welsh army. If the Welsh army numbered, according to the Earl of Salisbury, twelve thousand men, then we may reasonably assume that York’s army, being a “limb” of this “body”, is less than that, perhaps at the very least a fourth. But Aumerle’s analogy may be inaccurate since King Richard says in Westminster Hall as he looks into the glass:

Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men?
(IV.i.281-3)

King Richard says that he kept ten thousand men, presumably soldiers, in his command. When King Richard goes to Ireland to fight the rebels, we know that he does not take such a force with him because he does not bring such a force back to England when he lands in Wales. Bolingbroke confirms this, saying that the king has “lately landed/With some few private friends upon this coast” (III.iii.3-4). If we take King Richard’s words literally, we must conclude that the ten thousand men under his “household roof” are left in England under the command of York. But we simply don’t know this, so we can only say that York commands an army of not less than three thousand, but probably more towards ten thousand men of war when he speaks with the “banish’d traitor” (II.iii.60) at Coventry. We may also speculate that if York chooses to fight the rebels, his army, aided with the help of the “glorious angel[s]” (III.ii.61), toads, spiders and other creatures which King Richard evokes, will probably defeat the rebel forces. But York chooses not to fight, and if neither the size of his army, nor the palsy, nor old age compel him to defect, why then does he?

After King Richard seizes Gaunt’s estate, York lists, as I have said previously, a series of the “wrongs” that he imagines that the king has done to him:

one of which is his “own disgrace” (II.i.168). How has King Richard “disgraced” his uncle? Ure is uncertain, suggesting two possibilities, both of which are unconvincing. Quoting an unidentified historical account, Ure says that in 1398, the historical York, displeased with King Richard, withdrew into his own county. The phrase in question, Ure reasons, may refer to the loss of favour due to this retirement; but Ure himself points out the fallacy of his own interpretation, saying that “disgrace” could not have been a factor since the retirement was voluntary. Ure’s other interpretation is again based not on the text itself, but on another historical account, this one being *Woodstock*. In it, the historical Gloucester complained, “Richard with a...mind corrupt/Disgraced our names and thrust us from his court” (qtd. in Ure, 61). If Shakespeare is working with one or both of these themes, he certainly does not develop them within the text.

A theme which Shakespeare does develop or at least suggest within the drama is, as I have mentioned previously, York’s obsession with military prowess. York repeatedly praises, much to the weariness of his hearers, the exploits of “that young Mars of men” as well as his own fantastic deeds in which he allegedly slaughtered “thousands” of the French. He also speaks bold threats:

But if I could, by Him that gave me life,
I would attach you all and make you stoop
Unto the sovereign mercy of the king.
(II.iii.155-7)

Of course, no one actually believes him when he says this, but he devises such ploys anyway, in a desperate attempt to cope with the disgrace of being one of the sons of the war-like King Edward III and yet a coward. He may praise the Black Prince publicly, but secretly he envies and despises him because his brother’s prowess highlight his own cowardice so prominently. To make matters worse for this ridiculous character, he sees in King Richard’s face, the face of his warrior-brother mocking him: he says to his nephew, “His face thou hast, for even so look’d he” (II.i.176). York pathetically transfers his hatred and envy of the Black Prince on to his son, King Richard, who becomes the scapegoat for York’s “own disgrace”.

When Gaunt comforts his guilty conscience by accusing King Richard of the murder that he himself may have instigated or condoned, York may simply have echoed that slander in an effort to vilify the Black Prince through King Richard. (On the other hand, of course, it can also be convincingly argued, as I have acknowledged, that the king was actually a participant in the conspiracy, in which case his vilification by either Gaunt or York is hardly slander, but fact.) Curiously,

York becomes repentant towards God as the rebellion intensifies, convinced that his “untruth” (II.ii.101) has provoked God to judge the land with a “tide of woes” (II.ii.98). What is this “untruth” that York laments about? Ure assures us that it does not imply in any manner that York has been disloyal to the king (77), but I have suspicions. Is this “untruth” the slander that King Richard had treacherously murdered the Duke of Gloucester, the same slander that Henry Bolingbroke proclaims to justify the deposition of the “Lord’s anointed”?

Whatever feelings of regret York may have had for his part in the conspiracy against the king, he discards them at Coventry, where he does more than just slander his brother Edward through King Richard. At Coventry, he decides to inflict a “disgrace” on his name which will far surpass any “disgrace” that he himself has ever experienced, namely the removal of his lineage from the throne of England. A case certainly can be made to support the suspicion that York is an ally of Bolingbroke. After King Richard seizes Gaunt’s estate, York says that the king has pricked his “tender patience to those thoughts/Which honour and allegiance cannot think” (II.i.207-08). And with the Queen he again considers rebellion, saying:

Both are my kinsmen:
Th’one is my sovereign, whom both my oath
And duty bids defend; th’ other again
Is my kinsman, whom the king hath wrong’d,
Whom conscience and my kindred bids to right.
(II.ii.111-115)

Curiously, York says that “conscience and my kindred bids to right” Bolingbroke. Which kindred “bids” him to right the wrongs which King Richard has allegedly done to Bolingbroke? Is York referring to his immediate family, or is he saying that Bolingbroke is somehow communicating with him, “bidding” him to join the rebellion?

The initial meeting of Harry Percy and Bolingbroke is perplexing. Why, when Percy declares that he knows the power that the Duke of York has “levied” by Berkeley castle, does not Bolingbroke inquire of him? Is not such intelligence vitally significant in the preparations for the coming battle? Or does Bolingbroke already know that there will be no battle? And it seems that even York himself is making no preparations for war as Northumberland relates, asking, “And what stir/Keeps good old York there with his men of war?” (II.iii.51-2). Is Bolingbroke that “stir”?

The meeting of Bolingbroke and York is also odd. Of course it contains all of the appropriate conventions and proprieties: Bolingbroke kneels saying, “My

gracious uncle" (II.iii.85), and York makes a terrible fuss condemning with all the right terminologies, "detested treason" (II.iii.109). But both men seem to have an unspoken agreement and York, after playing the role of a loyal subject long enough, utters his infamous declaration: "I do remain as neuter" (II.iii.159). When Shakespeare wrote this line he may actually have been thinking of a verse in the *Revelation*, in which Christ, criticizing his followers in Philadelphia, says:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I
would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou
art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue
thee out of my mouth.

(*Revelation*, 3:15-6)

If the Philadelphians are required to give the divine king either a "hot" or a "cold" allegiance, then it follows, if we accept the premise that the philosophy of the chain of being is operating within the play, that the English nobles must do likewise to their earthly king. To be "neuter" is to be "lukewarm" and to incur the anger of the king who in disgust "spues" or spits such a subject out of his mouth. Is Shakespeare subtly revealing his own disgust for York? In the B.B.C. production, Northumberland mockingly laughs when York declares his "neutrality", as if he perceives the impossibility and absurdity of such a position. York is not a "neutral" subject, but a "cold" and cowardly traitor, unwilling to admit that by surrendering the powerful royalist forces, he has, like Judas Iscariot, betrayed the king and sealed not only his deposition, but his assassination as well. To eradicate any doubt within the minds of his readers regarding the duke's disloyalty, Shakespeare creates a moment in which York, waffling between the condemnation of the rebels' villainy and the praise of his own virtue, says:

So, fare you well;
Unless you please to enter in the castle
And there repose you for this night.

(II.iii.158-60)

An old hypocrite, oppressed by the weight of his continuous lies, York amicably invites his confederates to join him in the castle and partake of a cup of tea. But the machine-like Bolingbroke, smiling at his indiscretion, insists that they keep a false virtue; he insists that they continue to maintain that he has returned from exile not to usurp the crown, but to save the kingdom from a "wasteful king".

An offer, uncle, that we will accept.
But we must win your grace to go with us
To Bristow castle, which they say is held
By Bushy, Bagot, and their complices,
The caterpillars of the commonwealth,

Which I have sworn to weed and pluck away.
(II.iii.162-7)

Bolingbroke pretends to be a deliverer who has come to save the commonwealth from the “caterpillars”. Certainly, if we accept Bolingbroke’s metaphor of England being a garden, “caterpillars” are a mildly destructive element, but such a threat can hardly justify the invasion of a kingdom. If a kingdom is being destroyed by a Richard III who is madly, even gleefully killing everyone in sight, then an invasion such as that by Henry Richmond, can be justified. Is Shakespeare subtly and comically revealing the falseness of Bolingbroke? York, though, who is oblivious to these ideas, immediately submits to his dark lord, restating his own neutrality and his reluctance to break “his country’s laws” (II.iii.169) which, although unstated, obviously include divine right: York’s statement is disturbingly ironic and clearly establishes him as a hypocrite and a traitor. In the final Act, York gives King Henry IV the incriminating letter that he took from Aumerle and says, “Peruse this writing here, and thou shalt know/The treason that my haste forbids me show” (V.iii.47-8). On one level of interpretation, we assume that the “treason” that he talks about is the treason of his son, but on another level, we realize that he is ironically confessing to his own treason in that he betrays his own son, ignoring the counsel of his wife who pleads, “Wilt thou not hide the trespass of thine own” (V.ii.89)? Moreover, Shakespeare, apart from suggesting York’s own “treason”, also suggests his craftiness in that York refrains from verbally expressing or “show[ing]” his disreputable intention, opting instead to destroy his son by passively, yet cunningly surrendering the incriminating letter (even as he had voluntarily surrendered the royal army). If York is capable of concealing the “treason” which he has towards his son, can he not also conceal the “treason” which he bears towards the king? Such a question cannot, by the textual evidence alone, be answered with an absolute certainty, but Shakespeare has given us enough suggestions and hints that we may reasonably suspect the integrity of the duke’s character and even conclude that he is a “traitor foul and dangerous” who openly praises the king, but secretly despises him, slandering his good name and even plotting his deposition with Bolingbroke.

In *Richard III*, the Duke of Gloucester is openly portrayed conspiring with two murderers and saying:

But, sirs, be sudden in the execution,
Withal obdurate, do not hear him plead;
For Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps
May move your hearts to pity if you mark him.
(I.iii.345-48)

In this particular instance, Shakespeare faithfully echoes Holinshed's account, clearly establishing Gloucester as the murderer of his brother; but in *Richard II*, Shakespeare rather oddly departs from Holinshed who says that "they [Lancaster and Yorke] saw how the king...abstained not from such an heinous act" [Gloucester's murder] (qtd. in Boswell, 85), and refrains from definitively condemning his King Richard II as a murderer. Instead the "crime" is presented to the audience primarily through the testimony of two accusers, John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley. Initially their testimonies are quite damaging to the king's reputation, but an objective analysis of the characterizations of the accusers themselves yields possible motives which may have inclined the duo to incriminate their nephew. The accusation that King Richard murdered or "caus'd" the death of the Duke of Gloucester is by no means a conviction. On the contrary, it may simply be the sour fruit of two discontented and malicious men.

Before departing from this chapter of the thesis, I will now answer those questions which my argument has thus far obviously posed: why, if Gaunt is a fool, York a traitor and Richard not a murderer, does not Shakespeare clearly indicate as much? Why does Shakespeare draw a series of characterizations which are complicated with ambiguities and complexities? As I stated in the Introduction, Shakespeare, I think, had an patriotic inclination to present a dramatised version of English history which is faithful to the historical records of Holinshed and Hall; but since he chose to portray this history, or more specifically, King Richard himself, in a manner which is idealised, he had to address the complication of King Richard as being the alleged murderer of his uncle. Although Holinshed's definitive, even vulgar judgment of the historical King Richard as being a murderer may indeed be accurate, it is hardly consistent with the portrayal of a Christ-like king; and so to honour the historical accounts, however disagreeable, the playwright has included such an assessment of this king, but only through two media whose credibility is questionable. In so doing, Shakespeare permits the audience to formulate not only an unfavourable, but also a favourable interpretation of a king who may, depending upon the inclination of the reader, be either a murderer or a victim slandered by two unscrupulous uncles. Indeed, the portrayal of Gaunt, York and Richard, as they appear in the text of *Richard II*, is such that Shakespeare himself seems to be leaning towards that interpretation which emphasizes their apparent villainy, incompetence and innocence respectively.

CHAPTER IV

THE KING AND HIS FLATTERERS

The second accusation with which several of the characters attempt to colour our thinking of King Richard is that he allows “flatterers” to adversely influence him. John of Gaunt says:

And thou, too careless patient as thou art,
Commit'st thy anointed body to the cure
Of those physicians that first wounded thee:
A thousand flatterers sit within thy crown.
(II.i.97-100)

Gaunt says that King Richard is a “careless patient” which in one respect, is a description which supports Bergeron's, as well as Jones's thesis that the king is an unprincipled and frivolous man. I have argued, on the contrary, that King Richard can also quite easily be perceived as not necessarily a “careless”, but a “careful” man, opposing the “rival-hating envy” of his violent nobles and thereby preserving the civil concord of his kingdom. And even in I.iv. where Shakespeare develops the theme of a “careless”, extravagant man of “liberal largess”, there is also the theme of a responsible monarch who, unlike the “popinjay” described by Hotspur (*1 Henry IV*, I.iii. 50), does not despise the “vile guns” (*1 Henry IV*, I.iii.63) of war, but goes in person to Ireland to suppress a minor rebellion which threatens the stability of his orderly kingdom.

Gaunt also says that the king is influenced by a “thousand flatterers”. On the one hand, such an expression is simply the common rhetoric of the royal court, but on the other hand, it is also a wild and unfounded exaggeration which suggests Gaunt's irresponsibility. King Richard, as I have previously argued, confirms as much when he says that Gaunt is a “lunatic”, but he also says that Gaunt, being a sick man near death, is “presuming on an ague's privilege”. This expression may mean that Gaunt's reason is adversely affected by a delirious fit which causes him to speak prejudiced accusations against the king. Gaunt's exaggeration, therefore, that King Richard is a victim of “a thousand flatterers” may not even have the slightest factual basis.

The Earl of Northumberland also alleges that King Richard is “basely led” by flatterers. He says to Ross and Willoughby that

The king is not himself, but basely led
By flatterers, and what they will inform,
Merely in hate, 'gainst any of us all,

That will the king severely prosecute
'Gainst us, our lives, our children, and our heirs.
(II.i.241-45)

Saying that “the king is not himself”, Northumberland refers to an alternate political ideology: the King’s Two Bodies. According to this theory, Kantorowicz says, the kingship is divided into two parts: the body natural which is subject to “infirmities” and “imbecilities” and the body politic which is perfect and eternal. The tragedy of *King Richard II*, Kantorowicz argues, is a tragedy in which the infirmities of the body natural are revealed in all their degradation and finally separated from the ideal of kingship (26-40). Northumberland rejects the political ideology of the divine right of kings to advocate an alternate ideology which sanctions usurpation. Indeed, he says that the king, the body natural which is the man Richard, is not what the king, the body politic, should be; yet he is unwilling to directly slander the king, perhaps from a fear of heavenly retribution, but more likely from a fear that Ross and Willoughby, being loyal to the king, will report him. Instead of slander, Northumberland cleverly appeals to their fears, talking of monstrous “flatterers” who have enormous powers to move the king against the nobility. Northumberland’s reasoning is similar to that of Brutus who, thinking about the possible consequences of Caesar’s coronation, says:

How that might change his nature, there’s the question.
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
And that craves wary walking. Crown him? - that;
And then, I grant, we put a sting in him,
That at his will he may do danger with.

(*Julius Caesar*, II.i.13-17)

Both Northumberland and Brutus allude to things that “will” or “might” happen. Just as there is no precedent to cause Brutus to think that Caesar will become an “adder”, so too there is no textual evidence to support Northumberland’s proposition that the king’s advisers will influence the king to “severely prosecute” the noblemen. It might be argued that the king does “severely prosecute” Gaunt after his death, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support the idea that Green or Ross or Bagot influenced him to do so. Rather, Northumberland who is already planning the deposition and is undoubtedly in league with Bolingbroke himself (how else can he know so quickly that Bolingbroke is coming in arms?) simply advances a falsehood which is designed to excite the fears and discontentments of two cautious noblemen. Northumberland, who desires Ross and Willoughby to join the rebellion, knows that if they publicly criticize or judge the king, then they have violated the feudal tradition and jeopardized their very lives: indeed, as I have

stated previously, Carlisle asks, "What subject can give sentence on his king?" (IV.i.121).

In the beginning of the dialogue between the three noblemen, Ross clearly understands the dangerous implications of his political opinions and says:

My heart is great, but it must break with silence,
Ere't be disburdened with a liberal tongue.
(II.i.228-9)

Responding, Northumberland tempts them to "speak" their grievances, promising them anonymity:

Nay, speak thy mind; and let him ne'er speak more
That speaks thy words again to do thee harm!
(II.i.230-1)

But since this ploy fails to elicit the desired response, he alarms them and says that dangerous flatterers will influence the king to "severely prosecute" them and their children. Ross hesitantly responds to these allegations, saying only that the king has "pill'd" the commoners and "fin'd" the nobles. Such words are hardly treasonous, but they reveal the sentiments of a man whose inhibitions are being eroded. Willoughby also is being swayed and, seeking Northumberland's guidance, asks him, "But what, a 'God's name doth become of this?" (II.i.251). Sensing their vulnerability, Northumberland ventures into a bolder, but not quite incriminating judgment of his king, implying that he is a coward who has "basely yielded" (II.i.253) the gains of his ancestors; and a profligate who has recklessly spent the kingdom's finances. Willoughby then declares that King Richard is like a "broken man" (II.i.257): a statement which does not yet implicate him in treason. Frustrated, Northumberland then declares, "Reproach and dissolution hangeth over him" (II.i.258), and finally Ross says that the king has "robbed" Bolingbroke: a judgment which clearly means that the "Lord's anointed" is a thief! When Northumberland hears this declaration which implicates Ross in the conspiracy, he then boldly and openly "gives sentence" on King Richard and says that he is a "Most degenerate king" (II.i.262). Shocked, Ross understands the ramifications of their conversation:

We see the very wreck that we must suffer,
And unavowed is the danger now,
For suffering so the causes of our wreck.
(II.i.267-69)

The traitorous Northumberland even now fears that his new confederates will betray him, and says, "I dare not say/How near the tidings of our comfort is"

(II.i.271-2); but Ross openly declares that he and Willoughby are members of the conspiracy:

Be confident to speak, Northumberland:
We three are but thyself.

(II.i.274-5)

In response, Northumberland tells them of the invasionary force coming to “our northern shore”. Excited and fully supportive of the coming deposition, they say:

Ross To horse, to horse! urge doubts to them that fear.
Wil. Hold out my horse, and I will first be there.

(II.i.299-300)

Northumberland’s accusation therefore, that King Richard is adversely affected by dangerous “flatterers” is simply the first part of a clever stratagem which he has devised, to turn two cautious but disgruntled nobleman against the king. It should, I think, be disregarded.

York talks of vanities that are “buzz’d” (II.i.26) into the king’s ears, but since I have already considered the possible intentions of this character, I will pass over his comments and come to those of the gardener who, working in the garden of the Duke of York, is speaking unfavourably of three of the king’s advisers: Wiltshire, Bushy and Green. He says that they are “noisome weeds which without profit suck/The soil’s fertility from wholesome flowers” (III.iv.38-9). The gardener’s disparaging judgment of the noblemen should, on the one hand, be accepted unreservedly because the gardener himself is not only a type of Adam in Paradise, but also a type of Christ as well, since he speaks in a parable; but, on the other hand, it should be questioned because, unlike Adam and Christ, he has disturbingly violent tendencies which diminish his credibility. He commands his servant to be like an “executioner” (III.iv.33) and “cut off the heads of the too fast growing sprays” (III.iv.34); and he also says that they will “wound” the bark and “lop away” the branches of the fruit trees. The gardener symbolizes Bolingbroke himself, the Machiavellian prince who destroys Bushy, Green and Wiltshire precisely because they are “noisome weeds” who noisily oppose his rise to power. Having already proclaimed the rebels “revolted faction traitors” (II.ii.57), the king’s favourites again voice their opposition to Bolingbroke, just before they are executed, saying, “More welcome is the stroke of death to me/Than Bolingbroke to England” (III.i.31-2). The accusation that the gardener brings against King Richard that his counsellors are “weeds” which are ruining the kingdom, taking and

wasting its resources, is false, or at least questionable since, on the contrary, they are guarding the kingdom by opposing the deposition of its king.

Up to this point I have made a list of those who accuse King Richard of being influenced by “flatterers” and attempted to expose the possible motives which may have caused them to slander. I will now make a list of the “flatterers” themselves and consider whether they do, as York alleges, “buzz” vanities into King Richard’s ears. Predictably, Ure who is so willing to agree with whatever is said by the king’s enemies, concurs solidly with York’s allegation (lxvi). Holderness does not actually address this issue, but since he interprets King Richard as a tyrant, engaged in an political struggle with the barons, especially Bolingbroke, I imagine that he is opposed to the idea. Only Ornstein recognizes that King Richard is “too shrewd to be easily corrupted” (108). But even Ornstein’s judgment comes short of the mark because, in the text itself, King Richard has no corrupting influences whatsoever from which he must “shrewdly” desist. Indeed, he is counselled not by “flatterers”, but by men of practicality, wisdom and courage!

I have already said that Bushy, and implied that Green desert the king not because his cause is hopeless, but, being men accustomed to a courtly way of life, have a desire to avoid the bloodshed and violence of warfare. I have also implied that they redeem themselves when they defy Bolingbroke just before their execution, saying, “My comfort is, that heaven will take our souls,/And plague injustice with the pains of hell” (III.i.33-4). Neither of these two actions, the desertion nor the proclamation, support the accusation that they have, as Bolingbroke accuses them at their bogus trial, “misled” (III.i.8) the king. On the contrary, the one instance in which Green directly counsels the king, he urges “expedient manage[ment]” (I.iv.39) with regard to the Irish wars. Bushy never directly advises the king, only the queen to whom he does speak a load of “flattery”, but it is harmless enough and it is hardly destructive to the nobility as Northumberland allegedly fears. Traversi says that Bushy has the artifice of a courtier dedicated to flattery and expert in pursuing indirect paths to conviction (26). If, as I suspect, Traversi bases this conclusion primarily upon Bushy’s conversation with the queen, then he engages solely in speculation, since the text itself yields no evidence to support the proposition that Bushy has a “conviction” or an agenda to advance. Bushy and Green are young, immature, fearful courtiers who, like Saint Peter, deny their king and then redeem themselves before their deaths.

That Shakespeare intends these characters to be innocent of wrongdoing is apparent at their trial. Bolingbroke is obviously a type of Pilate, the fraudulent

judge, who attempts to wash their “blood/From off [his] hands” (III.i.5-6) when he charges them with crimes which are either outrageously or ludicrously false. Pertaining to the outrageous, Bolingbroke alleges that they have with their “sinful hours”

Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him,
Broke the possession of a royal bed,
And stain'd the beauty of a fair queen's cheeks
With tears drawn her eyes by your foul wrongs..
(III.i.12-5)

This accusation has caused not a little controversy among the critics, with Ure offering no less than six interpretations. One of them is that Bolingbroke is saying that Bushy and Green have had homosexual relations with the king (91). This viewpoint is clearly advanced by the director of the B.B.C. production, who stages I.iv. in a bath house where the king and his advisers are wearing only towels and laughing and drinking wine. I reject this interpretation though, because the textual dialogues between Bushy and Green and King Richard do not even remotely suggest that they have a sexual relationship. Another interpretation which I think is plausible, but Ure doesn't (91), is that Bolingbroke, by setting forth such an obvious and outrageous falsehood, is declaring his absolute authority in the kingdom: he is flaunting and mocking the moral system which forbids a subject to not only depose his king, but also to bear false witness. Clearly the text offers not even the slightest evidence of a “divorce” or a conflict of any kind between the king and the queen, who, on the contrary, repeatedly fawns over her “sweet Richard” (II.ii.9). It is a false accusation, easily dismissed.

The second outrage is that Bolingbroke claims that they made the king “misinterpret” (III.i.18) him. Again the text does not support this claim and I have argued that King Richard shrewdly considers for himself whether his noblemen are competent and loyal, and whether their advice is feasible.

Three of the charges are ludicrous. The first is that they have “unhappied” (III.i.10) a “happy gentleman” (III.i.9). These words have a carnivalesque theme which is shockingly inappropriate for the trial of two men convicted of treason. For Bolingbroke, their crime is not that they have counselled the King of England to make unwise governmental policies, but that they have somehow disrupted the merriment of a character who was merely a “happy gentleman”, unconcerned with the proper administration of his kingdom. Or it may be that Bolingbroke is being sardonic, since he himself is the one who deposed or “unhappied” King Richard. The second charge is that

...you [Bushy and Green] have fed upon my signories,
Dispark'd my parks and fell'd my forest woods,
From my own windows torn my household coat,
Raz'd out my impress, leaving me no sign,
Save men's opinions, and my living blood,
To show the world I am a gentleman.

(III.i.22-7)

The violence which is associated with “feeding upon”, “disparking”, “felling” and “tearing” Bolingbroke’s estate, further suggests a theme of carnivalesque indulgence. Bergeron notes that historically the carnival was a protest or even a revolt against the particular social, political and religious systems which were operating in medieval Europe, and which sometimes degenerated into a kind of “ritualized violence” (34,36). If Bushy and Green have committed these acts of vandalism, then they are not competent advisers, but revellers and wastrels; but since the text provides no evidence to substantiate Bolingbroke’s claims and since the accusations themselves are ridiculous, then Shakespeare invites us to suspect their validity. Moreover, the concept of an irrational world is further advanced by Bolingbroke in that he is not concerned necessarily about the loss of his personal property, but only about how such a phenomenon will affect “men’s opinions” of him. Bushy and Green have threatened his identity which in an insane world is an offence punishable by death. And finally, as if he can think of no more lies with which to justify their murder, he says unconvincingly, even flippantly, “This and much more, much more than twice all this,/Condemns you to the death” (III.i.28-9). Bergeron convincingly (but disturbingly) argues that *King Richard II* is not a tragedy, but a grotesque comedy in which the characters, especially the king, behave in an irresponsible manner. Such an interpretation is, of course, the exact opposite of what I am arguing, but in this particular instance, the trial of Bushy and Green, I too will advance such a theme (since it has no bearing on King Richard), concluding that Shakespeare cannot possibly intend his audience to seriously consider the “crimes” with which Bolingbroke charges the favourites. Indeed the proceeding is a mock trial in which not a Machiavellian prince, but a carnival king frivolously condemns two innocent men to the execution block.

The Duke of Aumerle is another of the king’s counsellors. He is a bold, decisive and somewhat crafty, but not necessarily dishonourable man, adamant in his loyalty to the king and in his opposition to Bolingbroke. In the court, as I have previously noted, he mocks the duke who, being banished, has departed the country. On the Welsh coast, he persuades the king to be courageous and resolute in his opposition to Bolingbroke, even after Salisbury brings the devastating news of the dispersal of the Welsh army, saying, “Comfort, my liege, remember who

you are" (III.ii.82). After Scroop informs them of the limited civil uprising against the king and the executions of Bushy and Green at Bristol Castle, he again persuades the king to quit his lamentations and oppose Bolingbroke with York's army, saying, "My father hath a power, inquire of him,/And learn to make a body of a limb" (III.ii.186-7). The king then wisely receives his council and says, "Thou chidest me well" (III.ii.188). After Scroop takes away all hope of a militaristic defense of the kingdom and tells them that the traitorous York has defected, the king and Aumerle retreat to Flint Castle where they reluctantly yield to the rebels. Turning to his wise counsellor, he asks him pathetically:

We do debase ourselves, cousin, do we not,
To look so poorly, and to speak so fair?
Shall we call back Northumberland, and send
Defiance to the traitor, and so die?
(III.iii.127-30)

The king has learned to trust Aumerle who, even now, in this hopeless situation advises the king to resist his antagonist:

No, good my lord; let's fight with gentle words,
Till time lend friends and friends their helpful swords.
(III.iii.131-2)

Aumerle, faced with calamity, does not lapse into verses of sorrowful poetry, as does King Richard; instead he considers and advocates the deceitful tactics which Bolingbroke has used against them. But here King Richard rejects Aumerle because he would rather lose his kingship than forsake the traditions and religious principles with which he has primarily directed his life. Aumerle continues to resist Bolingbroke even after the king is imprisoned, joining a conspiracy to assassinate the "pernicious blot" (IV.i.325). Unlike Bushy and Green though, he waffles in the end, begging for his life after he is implicated in the scheme. In sum, the Duke of Aumerle is hardly one of the "rash bavin wits" (*I Henry IV*, III.iii.61) that King Henry IV imagines counselled King Richard.¹ Instead he is a man of resolution whose presence with the king supports the proposition that King Richard himself is a man of resolution and competence, desiring the company of like men.

And finally, the Bishop of Carlisle is also one of King Richard's "flatterers"; but before his counsel can be properly interpreted, it must be considered within the context in which it is spoken. Having landed on the Welsh coast, King Richard says:

As a long-parted mother with her child

¹ In Chapter XII, I address King Henry's judgment of his predecessor.

Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,
So, weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands.
(III.ii.8-11)

Coleridge asserts that this speech reveals King Richard's patriotism as being compromised by a debilitating effeminacy or emotionalism (170). I disagree, thinking that a man whose compassion for his country is such that he, weeping, likens it to a "mother with her child" is a man not of weakness, but of principle. Jesus Christ, speaking of Jerusalem, said:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets,
and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often
would I have gathered thy children together, as a **hen**
doth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!
(*Luke*, 13:34)

Christ also expressed his desire for Jerusalem in terms of an imagery which has maternalistic connotations, and when He actually saw the city, He wept. Part of our modern resistance to Richard is a notion that his emotionalism is unmanly and effeminate (Cochrane), and to a certain extent, such a notion is justified as King Richard sometimes lapses into a grief which is so excessive that it is repulsive. But as I have stated in the beginning of Chapter II, if we reflect upon the extraordinary circumstances which elicit such a response from him, we may sympathise with "woe's slave". Moreover, if we resist the temptation to focus primarily upon his "ague fits of fear" and consider his characterisation as a whole, we will discover a character who demonstrates a tenderness and emotionalism which is consistent with a Christ-like ideal of manhood. Firstly, he, like Christ, expresses himself in terms of a feminine imagery which is by no means unmanly. On the contrary, his willingness to speak of motherhood is evidence that he not only respects and honours that institution, but womanhood in general. Indeed, in V.i., a sorrowful ex-king, condemned to the Tower, has the strength of character to remember the welfare of his distraught wife Isabella and says, "Hie thee to France,/And cloister thee in some religious house" (V.i.22-3). Similarly, Christ, suffering on the cross, looked down and saw his destitute mother and a disciple to whom he said, "Behold thy mother!" (*John*, 19:27). Secondly, he, like Christ, weeps not only for the joy of being in a particular country or city, but also for the sorrow of losing a friend. As Christ wept for Lazarus who had died, so too in V.i., Richard weeps for his banished Isabella, saying, "Weep thou for me in France, I for thee here;/Better far off than near, be ne'er the near (V.i.87-8). But like Christ, King Richard is not a character whose emotionalism is limited solely to images of maternal felicity and

pathos. As Christ rebuked his enemies, the Pharisees, calling them “hypocrites” (*Matthew*, 23:23a) and asking them, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (*Matthew*, 23:33), so too King Richard, turning his thoughts to his enemies, commands his “dear earth” (III.ii.6) to

...let thy spiders, that suck up thy venom,
And heavy-gaited toads lie in their way,
Doing annoyance to the treacherous feet,
Which with usurping steps do trample thee.
(III.ii.14-17)

And later, upon mistakenly thinking that Bushy and Green have betrayed him, he says, “O villains, vipers, damn’d without redemption!” (III.ii.129). Clearly King Richard is a character whose emotionalism is excessive but it is not, as Coleridge contends, unmanly. The tears that he cries and the maternal images that he evokes may not appeal to a modern audience which thinks that a man should not be vulnerable or sensitive; but such a definition of manhood is erroneous since Christ Himself, who some consider to have been the perfect man, did and said the same things.

Carlisle misunderstands him though, and says, “Fear not, my lord” (III.ii.27). Fear is not the theme of King Richard’s speech, but anger expressed in a manner which Carlisle cannot readily understand. But fear is the theme of the “ague fit” into which the king lapses after learning of the executions of Bushy and Green; but Carlisle counsels him, saying:

Fear and be slain, no worse can come to fight;
And fight and die is death destroying death.
(III.ii.183-4)

The bishop urges the king to be courageous and “fight” to the death. Indeed, during the deposition ceremony itself, the royal counsellor boldly risks his own life when he defends his “noble Richard” (IV.i.119) and defies the “foul traitor” (IV.i.135). The Bishop of Carlisle is clearly not one of the “flatterers” who “buzzes” foolish counsel into the king’s mind. He, not York, is the “sheer immaculate and silver fountain” (V.iii.61) of medieval honour: a static, choral voice of the glories of the old Edwardian order who, although not fully understanding King Richard, nevertheless advises him reasonably.

The accusation that King Richard is influenced by incompetent advisers is advanced by several characters within this play and one from another: Gaunt, York, Northumberland, the gardener and King Henry IV. The text itself, however, does not support these claims. On the contrary, Aumerle and Carlisle are bold and

generally honourable, while Bushy and Green, although disappointing in some respects, are generally harmless. Whereas the accusation that King Richard murdered his uncle cannot be verified or refuted since the action itself is not recorded in the text, these accusations can easily be refuted since the text presents a contrary view, as Gaudet readily acknowledges, asking, “Why has Shakespeare suppressed any clear sign of their [the favourites’s] guilt that would vindicate Northumberland’s fears and Bolingbroke’s executions” (159)? The answer, of course, is that Shakespeare has determined to present an idealised characterisation of this king, essentially untainted by Holinshed’s judgment:

Sir Iohn Bushie, in all his talke, when he proponed any matter vnto the king, did not attribute to him titles of honour, due and accustomed; but inuented vnused termes, and such strange names as were rather agreeable to the diuine maiestie of God, than to any earthlie potentate. The prince, being desirous inough of all honour, and more ambitious than was requisite, seemed to like well of his speech, and gaue good eare to his talk.

(qtd. in Boswell, 130)

Shakespeare rejects Holinshed’s account of King Richard “being desirous inough of all honour” that he surrounds himself with Sir Iohn Bushies and “the worst creatures that might be” (qtd. in Boswell, 130). Instead he asserts that the king is a shrewd character by placing him in the company of such capable advisers as Carlisle and Aumerle and even Bushy and Green, both of whom die courageously and defiantly. The accusation that King Richard is “misled” by flatterers, although stated by many, can be confidently and categorically dismissed.

CHAPTER V

THE COWARD-KING

The third accusation against King Richard is that he is a coward. Northumberland says:

Wars have not wasted it, for warr'd he hath not,
But basely yielded upon compromise
That which his noble ancestors achiev'd with blows.
(II.i.252-4)

The statement "wars have not wasted it" is ambiguous for two reasons: firstly, what is "it"? Judging from the context, I presume that Northumberland is referring to the "grievous taxes" which Ross has previously mentioned, but such a conclusion is not certain. Secondly, does "wasted" mean "squandered" or "used-up"? If the latter, then Northumberland is saying that wars have not squandered the nation's finance: such a statement is hardly a condemnation of King Richard, but a commendation. But Northumberland clearly denigrates the king when he says that he "basely yielded" the unspecified gains of his ancestors. To yield is not necessarily dishonourable, as Sir John Coleville demonstrates when he remarkably "yields" to Sir John Falstaff, but to yield "basely" clearly suggests a dishonourable, even a pusillanimous inclination on the part of the king. However, the extent of the king's "yielding" is qualified since it was done "upon compromise". The king's willingness to "compromise" and not make war, is not necessarily a sign of incompetence or cowardice, but shrewdness, since he has the political astuteness to achieve his ends not by "blows" and the shedding of his countrymen's blood, but by "compromise" and negotiation. Of course, the term "compromise" means that King Richard has "yielded" something, perhaps even in a manner which is "base" or humiliating, but it also implies that he has gained something which compensates for his "baseness". Northumberland does not reveal the nature of the royal compromise, but Holinshed writes that the historical King Richard ceded the French town of Brest to the Duke of Brittany and gained in return, an undisclosed sum of money: such a policy was not necessarily dishonourable since the town may have been indefensible or unprofitable and therefore expendable. Shakespeare, however, chooses not to reveal the nature of the king's "compromise" and so it is impossible to conclude, solely from Northumberland's account, that King Richard acted in a cowardly or "base" manner. What can be concluded undeniably is that Northumberland denigrates the king because he does not achieve his ends with "blows" of violence; but this is hardly a shortcoming since such a policy, as the

king himself delineates during the trial and after the cancelled tournament, has serious and dangerous ramifications.

Several instances within the tragedy portray a character who contradicts the testimony of Northumberland. In Ely House, the king says:

Now for our Irish wars:
We must supplant those rough rug-headed kerns,
Which live like venom where no venom else
But only they have privilege to live.
(II.i.155-8)

The expression “rough rug-headed kerns” is an odd description of rebellious subjects. “Kerns”, of course, are simply light-armed Irish soldiers (Ridley, 133); but why does the king refer to their physical appearance, in particular, their shaggy hair? On one hand, we conclude that the king, whom Queen Isabella calls a “most beauteous inn” (V.i.13), is a handsome man who vainly denigrates others who lack his physical beauty. Such an interpretation clearly supports the Bergeronian interpretation of a flippant king. Moreover, why does he say that they are “rough”? Such a word seems to be an inappropriate description of armed rebels. It seems to indicate a man who has an imperfect, even a ridiculous understanding of war as being merely “rough” when, in fact, it is violent and bloody. But are these interpretations the only or “correct” interpretations?

Holinshed writes that the “wild Irish dailie wasted and destroyed the townes and villages within the English pale, and had slaine manie of the souldiers which laie there in the garison for defense of that countrie” (qtd in Boswell, 89). Shakespeare, however, refrains from such a definitive judgment of the Irish rebels, allowing the king, in referring to them, to only, but repeatedly mention the word “venom”. Venom, of course, is a deadly poison which is associated with a lethal and dangerous animal, the snake; and so by inference, we conclude that the poet-king has an understanding of the rebels which is similar to Holinshed’s. Indeed, he even speaks of the campaign against them as being “these great affairs” (II.i.159). If the king therefore, knows that the “kerns” are “venomous” or, as Holinshed implies, murderous, then his derogatory epithet is the sign of a bold man who does not fear, but mocks even such dangerous outlaws. Regarding the term “rough”, it must be noted that Bolingbroke, whom few would accuse of being cowardly, also says this word when he declares that Gloucester’s blood calls to him for “rough chastisement”. The king’s statement regarding the Irish rebellion, although clearly not the statement of a Coriolanus or Macbeth can, nevertheless, be interpreted in a manner which is complimentary to his personal fortitude.

On the Welsh coast, King Richard has several fits which are clearly not the behaviour of a courageous man; but what is generally ignored by most critics is that the king has the strength to recover himself. After learning of the dispersal of the Welsh army, the king says:

All souls that will be safe, fly from my side,
For time hath set a blot upon my pride.
(III.ii.80-1)

But after Aumerle encourages him, he says:

I had forgot myself: am I not a king?
Awake, thou coward majesty! thou sleepest.
Is not the king's name twenty thousand name?
Arm, arm, my name! a puny subject strikes
At thy great glory.
(III.ii.83-7)

Just as a bold king calls the dangerous Irish soldiers “rug-headed kerns”, so too he calls Bolingbroke a “puny subject” who will be confronted not with ideologies, but with arms and military power. After he learns of the executions of Bushy and Green, he has another particularly bad fit, but, receiving the chastisements of first Carlisle and then Aumerle, he again recovers himself:

Thou chidest me well; proud Bolingbroke, I come
To change blows with thee for our day of doom.
(III.ii.188-9)

Again we perceive a man who is more than willing to fight for his kingdom, but only within reason: after Scroop tells him that York and his whole army have joined Bolingbroke, he knows that his small force cannot possibly resist the rebel army, and so he sensibly surrenders. That the force that King Richard brings back from the Irish campaign is small cannot be doubted since the pragmatic Bolingbroke says that the king has “lately landed/With some few private friends upon this coast” (III.iii.3-4); and yet Ornstein says that King Richard is a coward who “steals away” (116) from an army of twenty thousand soldiers prepared to die in the defense of his right to the crown!

Undoubtedly Ornstein is referring to those lines with which King Richard, upon learning that the Welshmen have fled, metaphorically describes his misapprehension, saying:

But now the blood of twenty thousand men
Did triumph in my face, and they are fled;
And, till so much blood thither come again,

Have I not reason to look pale and dead?
(III.ii.76-9)

The poet-king is not talking about twenty thousand men, much less soldiers, but about their blood, which in his fecund mind, did symbolically “triumph” in him. So much blood is a symbol for the vitality and courage with which he is prepared to meet Bolingbroke face to face in battle. But after he learns that “they”, not the fictitious “twenty thousand men”, but the twelve thousand Welshmen, “are fled”, then his “blood” or courage is replaced with a fear which pales his face in a hyperbolic fashion. But King Richard soon “remember[s]” (III.ii.82) who he is and asks himself rhetorically, “Is not the king’s name worth twenty thousand names?” (III.ii.85). Again, King Richard is not talking literally about twenty thousand men, but about their names; he is saying that his name which means the “Lord’s anointed” has enormous implications. To say, as does Ornstein, that these lines indicate that King Richard is a coward who commands an army of twenty thousand soldiers, even after York’s army has defected and the Welsh captain’s has dispersed, is to advocate an erroneous interpretation.

And finally, in Pomfret Castle, the king, being attacked by several assassins, says:

How now, what means death in this rude assault?
Villain, thy own hand yields thy death’s instrument.
 Snatching an axe from a servant and killing him
Go thou and fill another room in hell.
 He kills another
(V.v.105-7)

As “rough” kerns seems to be an inappropriate expression to describe potential killers, so too, a “rude” assault seems to be a word which undervalues the seriousness of the situation. Again the king is a poet who perceives his life in terms which are extraordinary, but such a mentality does not necessarily indicate a weakness of character. Indeed, he kills one assailant with an “axe” and then another, speaking all the while in terms which might cause Macbeth to blush. Even Exton, after killing him, says that he was “As full of valour as of royal blood” (V.v.113).

In summary, Northumberland clearly implies that King Richard is a coward, saying he has not “warr’d” but “basely yielded” the unspecified gains of his ancestors. Although this allegation cannot be substantiated by the text alone, King Richard does, however, undeniably act in a “base” or pusillanimous manner on the shores of the Welsh coast. But even these exhibitions must be judged within the context of his recoveries. Clearly, King Richard is an emotional and sensitive man

who sometimes experiences a “coward majesty”, but Shakespeare clearly vindicates this character in the end by making him “valiantlie defend himselfe”, as Holinshed writes (qtd. in Boswell, 126), even when confronted with his own murderers. King Richard is ultimately, I think, a courageous man.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRODIGAL KING

The final accusation against the king is that he financially mismanages his kingdom by overtaxing the commoners and spending that income in a manner which may indicate a certain irresponsibility. Ross says, “The commons hath he pill’d with grievous taxes” (II.i.246); likewise, Bagot, a favourite of the king who, speaking privately to the other favourites, has no reason to bear false witness, says:

...for their [the wavering commons’] love
Lies in their purses, and whoso empties them
By so much fills their hearts with deadly hate.
(II.ii.129-31)

Judging from the context of this statement, we almost certainly conclude that “whoso” is a reference to King Richard; but we should also note that Shakespeare, unlike Holinshed, desists from categorically implicating the king, by name, in this misdeed. It seems that even in this instance in which the king’s guilt is beyond a reasonable doubt, Shakespeare deliberately introduces the slightest of uncertainties which may be an attempt to partially shield the king from even the accusation that he “empties” the “purses” of the commoners. However, the image of the commoners throwing “dust” (V.ii.30) upon the deposed king’s head, as he is paraded in the streets of London, only verifies Bagot’s assertion that they, being overtaxed, are filled with a “deadly hate” for him; and the testimonial evidence against the king only increases as Gaunt, in chorus with the other two witnesses, calls his nephew, “Landlord of England art thou now, not king” (II.i.113).

Although King Richard may have overtaxed the commoners, there is no textual evidence to support the proposition that he even taxes the nobles! Holderness, however, disagrees with such a conclusion, referring to Lord Willoughby who says that “the Earl of Wiltshire hath the realm in farm” (II.i.256). Holderness asserts that “farming the realm” involved the transference of a portion of the royal revenues or taxes, which are levied from nobles and commons, to an individual in exchange for sums of ready money” (238). Perhaps within the historical context of medieval England, such a statement implies, as Holderness says, that the nobles were taxed by the king, but within the literary context of this play, such a conclusion is unwarranted. None of the conspirators ever complains about the “grievous taxes” which they themselves must bear: only Ross says that “the nobles hath he fin’d/For ancient quarrels, and quite lost their hearts” (II.i.247-8). The concept of a “fine” implies not a systematic taxation or “farming”, but an isolated, and perhaps uncommon incident; but more importantly, Shakespeare

depicts a king who practices a sound financial policy, penalizing those nobles who dare to threaten the stability of his realm with their futile and “ancient quarrels”. We recall that in I.i., the king suspects that Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray with an “ancient malice”, and after cancelling the tournament, the king again mentions the “rival-hating envy” of the barons which threatens to “wake our peace”. Ross, ironically, even comically then, is actually denigrating a competent king who perceives not only a dangerous ignorance in his subjects, but seeks to eradicate it with a severe, but prudent fiscal policy.

However, King Richard clearly behaves in a desperate manner when he declares that

If that [the farming of the realm] comes short,
Our substitutes at home shall have blank charters;
Where to, when they shall know what men are rich,
They shall subscribe them for large sums of gold,
And send them after to supply our wants.
(I.iv.47-51)

Apart from “fining” his troublesome nobles according to a financial policy which is a responsible one, the king also “subscribes” some of them for “large sums of gold”. This is clearly an offence which understandably alienates the nobles from the king; but is this also an isolated phenomenon which is only exacted in the emergency of the Irish war? Neither Ross nor Willoughby ever criticizes the king for previously enacting this kind of policy upon them, or any other noble, so perhaps Shakespeare is passively asserting that it is only an extraordinary measure never before implemented. But even so, a policy of “blank charters” arouses our suspicion, even our disapproval which is only increased when the king says that the revenue will supply not his “needs” but his “wants”. And upon hearing of Gaunt’s sickness, he says:

The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.
(I.iv.61-2)

His desire to “deck” his soldiers with “coats” clearly has the connotation of a carnival king who is concerned not with the suppression of a rebellion, but only with the thrill of toy-like soldiers masquerading in new costumes; but, of course, it can be argued that the new coats may have a military value: perhaps they will replace old and tattered coats which adversely affect morale, or perhaps they are an additional issue, needed for a colder climate. Shakespeare is ambiguous.

Several characters within the play, however, clearly accuse the king of spending the royal income extravagantly and irresponsibly. Northumberland says,

“More hath he spent in peace than they [his ancestors] in wars” (II.i.255), and the gardener calls King Richard a “wasteful king” (III.iv.55). But what did the king purchase, and similarly, how did he waste whatever it is that he wasted? Perhaps Northumberland and the gardener, both of whom have a propensity for violence (Northumberland takes Bushy and Green to the block and may even perform the execution himself) have a value system which is contrary to King Richard’s and ours, the audience’s. What they consider to be “wastefulness” may, by another standard, not be.

Surprisingly, the only character who actually delineates the nature of the king’s “wastefulness” is the king himself!

We will ourself in person to this war:
And, for our coffers, with too great a court
And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light,
We are inforc’d to farm our royal realm,
The revenue whereof shall furnish us
For our affairs in hand.

(I.iv.42-7)

King Richard’s admission that he has “too great a court” seems to be a piece of evidence which advances Gaudet’s argument that the king supports “parasitical counsellors” (144), but again such a conclusion is only speculation. The king also mentions a “liberal largess” which seems to indicate an extravagance, the limitations of which, however, are not defined. Shakespeare will not allow one of the characters to clarify this issue as, in contrast, he makes Flavius unquestionably define the extent of Timon’s “flow of riot”:

No care, no stop; so senseless of expense,
That he will neither know how to maintain it,
Nor cease his flow of riot. Takes no accompt
How things go from him, nor resumes no care
Of what is to continue.

(*Timon of Athens*, II.ii.1-5)

Neither does Shakespeare portray the king in a Timon-like feast, recklessly giving away jewels and other gifts. That King Richard is, therefore, a “wasteful king” is a conclusion which is built upon an unsound foundation: Northumberland’s allegation is ambiguous and the gardener’s unsubstantiated, while King Richard’s allegation against himself, although suspicious, is not necessarily self-incriminating: his “liberal largess” is never explicitly defined, but only presented within the context of his “coffers” which are “grown somewhat light”, as if his liberality has not seriously affected the financial reserve. However, complications exist: for example, why, if the national treasury is only “somewhat light”, does he

then farm the realm for “large sums of gold”? And what exactly are the “wants” which compel him to undertake such a radical financial policy? Although the concept of a “wasteful king” is clearly stated in the text, such an allegation is not presented within the text as being conclusively apparent.

The accusation, however, of a king who “farms” the commoners is. Two accusers, one of whom is an ally of the king, clearly attributes this fault to him, and the general reaction of the populace to him after he is deposed seems to confirm their testimonies. Although the exactions of “burthenous taxations” upon the commoners is clearly a contradiction to sound financial policy, it is hardly a reason to compel the nobles, Ross, Willoughby and Northumberland especially, to join an armed rebellion against the king. Indeed, how can these nobles have even the slightest concern for the commoners, when they, as well as all of the nobles in this play with the exception of Bolingbroke, whose motives are specious as I shall argue in Chapter X, are alienated and separated from them. *Richard II* is unique in that unlike the other plays in the second tetralogy, it depicts only the world of the nobility, while the world of the commoners is virtually ignored, being that of “slaves” (I.iv.27) whose blood is comparatively of less value than a nobleman’s “honour”: indeed, Bolingbroke will sooner shed it upon the “summer’s dust” (III.iii.43) than lose his lands and his title of nobility. Falstaff, talking of the commoners that he has pressed, says that they are “slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth” (*1 Henry IV*, IV.ii.25-6), who are “good enough to toss, food for powder, food for powder, they’ll fill a pit as well as better” (*1 Henry IV*, IV.ii.65-6). Perhaps, Ross, like Falstaff and presumably all of the noblemen in this play and all of the History Plays, is not actually concerned with the plight of the commoners, but only cites their discontent in an effort to justify his part in the coming usurpation. The accusation that King Richard has “pill’d” the commoners is valid, but hardly a reason to condone the deposition of the “Lord’s anointed”.

CHAPTER VII

THE KING PROVOKED

The confiscation of Gaunt's estate by the king is a phenomenon of singular importance within the tragedy, since this particular act apparently is the impetus which motivates several of the nobles to rebel against the king. Ross, saying that the the king has "robbed" Bolingbroke, flies to Coventry and Bolingbroke himself declares that he has invaded the kingdom so that his "banishment repeal'd/And lands restor'd again be freely granted" (III.iii.40-1). York, however, delivers the greatest indictment of the king:

Oh my liege,
Pardon me, if you please; if not, I, pleas'd
Not to be pardon'd, am content withal.
Seek you to seize and gripe into your hands
The royalties and rights of banish'd Hereford?
Is not Gaunt dead? and doth not Hereford live?
Was not Gaunt just? and is not Harry true?
Did not the one deserve to have an heir?
Is not his heir a well-deserving son?
Take Hereford's rights away, and take from time
His charters, and his customary rights;
Let not tomorrow then ensue to-day;
Be not thyself; for how art thou a king
But by fair sequence and succession?
(II.i.186-199)

Holderness says that this speech reflects the spirit of the Magna Carta, but does not actually quote a relevant passage from that document which allows us to confirm his conclusion. Holderness thinks that York is saying that King Richard has violated the social contract which guarantees the lords certain constitutional rights in exchange for their service and loyalty. The king, Holderness concludes, has himself raised the "spectre of rebellion" even in York's "well-disposed" heart (65).

It is a curious thing that Holderness omits three lines of this part of York's speech, 192-4, in which York asks a series of questions, the answers to which are by no means certain. The first one is: "Was not Gaunt just?" I have addressed primarily Gaunt's intellectual competence, concluding that the king's epithet may have some viability, but York now raises the question of Gaunt's moral integrity, suggesting that he was not, as is commonly assumed, a man of the highest ethical principles. This suspicion is increased when Justice Shallow, speaking of Double, a bowman, says, "Jesu, Jesu, dead! a' drew a good bow, and dead! a' shot a fine shoot. John a Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head" (2 *Henry IV*, III.ii.43-5). On the one hand, such a statement compliments Gaunt, as

Humphreys notes, since it reiterates his association with England's golden age of the long bow, with which she won the battles of Crecy and Poitiers (98). Moreover, Shallow's comment also suggests that Gaunt was a man of the common people, who was not above frequenting their fairs (Cochrane). However, it also raises the disturbing notion that this man who criticized King Richard for the way in which he managed the country's finances, calling him "the Landlord of England", was himself a gambler who risked or even squandered "much money"! And the questions pertaining to Bolingbroke are only comical: "Is not Harry true" and "Is not his heir a well-deserving son?" The answer to both of these questions is a resounding yes! Shakespeare deliberately introduces a theme of irony into York's apparently grave and indignant condemnation of King Richard's action, inviting his readers to consider an interpretation which is inconsistent with York's.

It is unnecessary for me to repeat my analysis of the "violent fires" (II.i.34) which burn and provoke the king to confiscate the dead Gaunt's estate. Essentially, we recall that Gaunt disregards York's surprisingly "wholesome counsel" and rebukes the king, even calling for his deposition. What is generally not acknowledged about this particular scene, however, is the context in which Gaunt says these things to the king. They are in Ely House, accompanied not only by the king's favourites, but by Ross and Willoughby and eventually Northumberland. These noblemen, who have witnessed and undoubtedly approve of the proceedings of Mowbray's trial, share that mentality which compels a nobleman to violently resist anyone who questions his "honour", regardless of whether such a questioning is relevant or not: failure to do so constitutes in their minds, weakness. King Richard knows, having suffered a serious affront to his own "honour", that he must reassert himself in the opinions of his war-like nobles or risk the loss of their respect and possibly even their allegiance, as they refrain from paying homage to a dishonoured king; yet, he hesitates and says:

Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son,
This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head
Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.
(II.i.121-3)

Jones asserts that King Richard demonstrates throughout the tragedy, a growing "neglection" of his nation's heroic past (69), but here he plainly states that only because the "unreverent" Gaunt is related to "great Edward" does he permit him to live. He does, however, severely rebuke him, speaking with a violent imagery which is meant not only to caution Gaunt, but also to appease Northumberland who is intently observing the king, wondering how he will respond to such abuse of his

person. Only after Gaunt publicly accuses him of "tapping" out the blood of Gloucester, does the king perceive a threat so hostile to his interests that he is compelled to exact a penalty which unmistakably warns all of his subjects that he will not tolerate such irreverence to his person:

And for these great affairs do ask some charge,
Towards our assistance we do seize to us
The plate, coin, revenue and moveables,
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possess'd.
(II.i.159-62)

And yet the king relents, confiscating only the "traitor's" income and merchandise, and sparing his presumably vast tracts of land. Perhaps even now, he is still attempting to "Forget, forgive, conclude and be agreed", even as he had counselled Bolingbroke and Mowbray.

York, however, continues Gaunt's "rash, fierce blaze of riot" (II.i.33), and also indirectly accuses him of the murder of Gloucester, saying that "His [the Black Prince's] hands were guilty of no kindred blood" (II.i.182). Concluding, he says:

Now, afore God - God forbid I say true! -
If you do wrongfully seize Hereford's rights,
Call in the letters patents that he hath
By his attorneys-general to sue
His livery, and deny his offer'd homage,
You pluck a thousand dangers on your head,
You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts,
And prick my tender patience to those thoughts
Which honour and allegiance cannot think.
(II.i.200-08)

Firstly, York criticizes the king, saying that he has unwisely denied or ignored Bolingbroke's request that his banishment be repealed, or at least modified. But York's criticism is unwarranted because the king's unwillingness to comply with Bolingbroke's demand is a sign of a man of resolution who knows that compromise and indecision will never contain Bolingbroke's "eagle-winged pride". Even to the banished Mowbray who is one of his few loyal subjects, he is uncompromising, saying, "It boots thee not to be compassionate;/After our sentence plaining comes too late" (I.iii.174-5). Secondly, York threatens him, saying that if he does not comply with his counsel, then he will lose a "thousand well-disposed hearts" and suffer a civil war. But the king angrily responds:

Think what you will, we seize into our hands
His plate, his goods, his money and his lands.
(II.i.209-10)

Provoked again, the king finally and ultimately asserts his authority, confiscating even the “lands” of the one who originally opposed him. The king is courageously prepared to “leave...no sign” (III.i.25) that Gaunt was ever a “gentleman” (III.i.27), rather than endure those insults, accusations, criticisms and threats which undermine his ability to rule effectively.

My interpretation, however, is not without complications. Before coming to Ely House, King Richard says:

The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.
(I.iv.61-2)

It may be argued that these lines indicate that the confiscation is a preconceived action on the part of King Richard to destroy the power base of his enemy Bolingbroke. Certainly the king recognizes Bolingbroke as an enemy, but can we conclude from these lines that the confiscation is preconceived? Clearly, the king has decided beforehand that he will take the "lining of [Gaunt's] coffers", but what does this phrase mean? "Coffers" are chests which contain some unknown amount of coined money and the "lining" is literally the material which covers the inside of those undisclosed number of chests. At the risk of splitting hairs, I will point out that he has the intention of taking only "the lining" and not the "coffers" themselves, as if he intends to take only those coins which, like the lining, form a covering around the bulk of the coins within the chests. But even if we conclude that he means to take the entire contents of the "coffers", then still his intentions are limited to only a part of Gaunt's total estate which, as he clearly delineates, consists of “plate”, “coin”, “revenues”, “moveables” or “goods” and “lands”. We know that Gaunt's finances consist of "coin" and revenues", but can we know that the "lining of his coffers" constitutes both of these sources of income? I think that we cannot; neither can we categorically state that the “coffers” include the “plate” and the “moveables” since they appear not to be coins; and no one, of course, would assert that they include Gaunt's “lands”. A reasonable conclusion is that the confiscation of Gaunt's total estate is not a preconceived, but a spontaneous decision, provoked initially by Gaunt's tirade and ultimately by York's.

II.i. is a scene which clearly indicates the extent of the conflict between the monarchy and certain members of the nobility. The king, however, is not necessarily an antagonist or, as Holderness asserts, an absolutist or tyrannical ruler imposing his unreasonable will upon subjects who are predisposed to be loyal to him (70-1). Rather, he is an enlightened, idealistic ruler determined to overcome the challenge which certain of his unruly subjects pose to his authority. To

suppress their “rival-hating envy” he fines some and banishes others; to thwart their “sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts”, he denies the appeal of one and even confiscates the estate of another. Indeed, to passively receive both Gaunt’s and York’s abuse to his person is folly; he must retaliate with severity or risk the loss of not only his “honour”, but also possibly his kingdom, as Ross, Willoughby, Northumberland and other nobles seek to bring what they consider to be a murderer-king to justice. The confiscation of Gaunt’s estate is a complex development of the plot which cannot simply be interpreted, as Ornstein does, as the “unpardonable sin” (111). On the one hand, such an action clearly violates certain codes of the feudalistic tradition, but, on the other hand, it must be viewed within the context of the continuing threat which England’s nobility pose to a king who is determined to preserve the fragile peace which is asleep in his “country’s cradle”.

CHAPTER VIII

A TYPE OF CHRIST

Up to this point in my thesis, I have addressed and attempted to refute or at least neutralize the various accusations which are made against King Richard. It is alleged that he has plotted the death of his uncle Gloucester; heeded the erroneous counsel of flatterers; cravenly yielded to the French; financially mismanaged the kingdom; and wrongfully taken the late Gaunt's estate. Some of the critics have unreservedly accepted these allegations and concluded that King Richard is an incompetent, lawless, effeminate and weak ruler whose deposition is easily justified. Ornstein says, "So responsible seems Richard for the calamity that befalls him and so inevitable seems his tragic fall, that one cannot believe that Shakespeare wanted to persuade his audience that Richard should have been allowed to continue the rash blaze of riot which threatened to destroy England" (113). Yet, when we read the text itself, we never actually witness firsthand King Richard's "rash blaze of riot". Indeed, the text clearly reveals a character who is, in fact, not "misled" by his favourites and whose confiscation of Gaunt's estate is not "wrong", as York alleges, but even necessary. Of course, we also perceive a character who sometimes evokes our suspicions and even our aversion as he whimpers detestably, but I think that he, unlike Timon, never lapses into a reckless abandonment. On the contrary, I think that before the invasion, he acts in a manner which is competent and even admirable as he attempts, perhaps futilely, to govern what the Constable of France calls "a barbarous people" (*Henry V*, III.v.4). And so, lacking any clear textual evidence to support the accusations, I have turned my attention firstly to the syntax of the accusations themselves, noticing ambiguities which seriously compromise their viability; and secondly, to the accusers themselves, concluding that some of them do indeed have "barbaric" tendencies which may compel them to slander a peace-loving king whose agenda is in conflict with their own "values", and even plot his deposition. The Gardener, for example, is extraordinarily violent and crass, while Bolingbroke and Northumberland have learned to cover their own destructive and unscrupulous intentions with a facade of deceitful speeches. Gaunt and York, on the other hand, although not "barbaric", are certainly complex characters who cannot simply be interpreted, as we may initially be tempted to do, as "fountains" of medieval virtue. Shakespeare deliberately and purposefully introduces discrepancies and inconsistencies into the characterizations of the king's accusers, intentionally undermining their seemingly indignant and virtuous opinions. But why?

That Shakespeare designs King Richard to be a type of Christ is a commonplace which is so obvious that it hardly needs clarification. In the deposition scene, Carlisle, contemplating the disorder that he thinks will ensue the deposition of King Richard, predicts that England will become a “field of Golgotha” (IV.i.144). King Richard compares himself to Christ and those who are in the court of the deposition to Judas, saying, “Did they not sometime cry, ‘all hail!’ to me?/So Judas did to Christ” (IV.i.169-70). And elsewhere in the same scene, King Richard says to the deponents:

Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.
(IV.i.239-42)

York, describing Richard’s public procession, says:

Even so, or with much more contempt, men’s eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard; no man cried ‘God save him!’
(V.ii.27-8)

Christ was mocked before and after he was led away to Golgotha. He may have been mocked during the procession, as is Richard, but none of the gospel writers record such an event. Also York refers to him as being “gentle”, even as Christ referred to Himself as being “meek” (*Matthew*, 11:29). And finally, Exton, having murdered the ex-king, laments as did Judas when he realized that he had delivered Christ to those who would kill him. Although the theme of King Richard as being a type of Christ is a concept which is generally acknowledged, the extent to which Shakespeare develops it is almost universally ignored.

Describing Christ’s trial, Saint Luke writes:

And they [the chief priests and the people] began to
accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting
the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar,
saying that he himself is Christ a King.
(*Luke*, 23:2)

Is King Richard, like Christ, also a victim of false witnesses? Are Bolingbroke, Northumberland, York and even Gaunt, types of pharisees or chief priests who accuse the king falsely? In the temple, Christ repeatedly said that the pharisees were “hypocrites” (*Matthew*, 23:13,14,15,23,25,27,29) and also “fools” (*Matthew*, 23:18,19). Such judgments also explain the characterizations of the king’s accusers who talk of their loyalty to him even as they rebel against him; and curiously, Christ

said that they were “fools” which is the exact term with which Richard judges Gaunt.

In King Richard’s own trial, which resembles Christ’s, the chief nobles never directly accuse him as the chief priests accused Christ, of having committed any crimes. Northumberland, however, repeatedly commands the King to read and acknowledge

These accusations, and these grievous crimes,
Committed by your person, and your followers,
Against the state and profit of this land.
That, by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos’d.
(IV.i.223-7)

The contents of these “articles” are never disclosed, but we may reasonably assume that, since Northumberland approves of them, they at least contain the accusations which he himself has made, namely that the king has an irresponsible fiscal, as well as a dishonourable foreign policy; and in all probability they contain the other accusations as well, including that of the murder of Gloucester. But King Richard will not read them: why? Perhaps he is ashamed, as he himself declares, saying:

Gentle Northumberland,
If thy offences were upon record,
Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop
To read a lecture of them?
(IV.i.229-32)

But this interpretation is not plausible since the king is clearly being ironic, referring to Northumberland as being “gentle” and the other nobles as “fair”. Perhaps he is incapable, as he himself declares, saying, “Mines eyes are full of tears, I cannot see” (IV.i.244); but this is also an inadequate explanation, since he quickly recovers his ability to see, studying his face in the glass. Or perhaps, like Christ who Himself never acknowledged the accusations which were made against Him, the king silently asserts his innocence by refusing to read them.

In Christ’s trial, the Pharisees, being unable by themselves to convince Pilate to condemn Christ, turned to the crowds of people and elicited their assistance. Saint Matthew writes, “But the chief priests and elders **persuaded** the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus” (*Matthew*, 27:20); and Saint Mark writes, “But the chief priests **moved** the people, that he [Pilate] should rather release Barabbas unto them” (*Mark*, 15:11). So successful were their efforts that the “multitudes” rioted, shouting “Crucify him” (*Mark*, 25:13b), and Pilate, seeking to maintain order, relented. The role of the people is fundamental to the

condemnation of Christ, but where in the deposition scene or anywhere else in *Richard II* does Shakespeare write a part for the people?

In an ingenious essay entitled “The Role of the Audience in *Richard II*”, Phyllis Rackin says that Shakespeare creates an extra role in the play which is not listed in the *dramatis personae*. She maintains that the rebels coax us, the audience, to join their dangerous enterprise, share their fatal choices and participate in their crimes and errors (262-3). I agree with Rackin that Shakespeare includes the audience in the main action of the plot, but I disagree with her in that I think that Shakespeare assigns us not an active, but a passive role. We do not make choices with Northumberland and York as though we, being their equals, have an authority to influence them with our own opinions; instead, they attempt to “persuade” and “move” us to believe only the unfavourable things that they say about the king and ultimately to condone what they are doing to him. Unlike the Jewish elders, however, who influenced the Jewish people to adopt their opinions of Christ, the conspirators recognize a certain hesitancy in our minds. Bolingbroke says:

Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender; so we shall proceed
Without suspicion.

(IV.i.135-7)

Bolingbroke is addressing us, the audience because our “view” or judgment of the proceeding is one of “suspicion”. Bolingbroke fears that a series of essentially unsubstantiated allegations has failed to “persuade” us of the king’s guilt, but he hopes that the king’s willingness to “surrender” his crown will. Northumberland also shares this anxiety, repeatedly insisting that the king read the “articles”

That by confessing them, the souls of men
May deem that you are worthily depos’d.

(IV.i.226-7)

Of course, King Richard will not comply, achieving what Folland calls a “pallid victory” (390), and further arousing our suspicions with regard to the “worthiness” of the events that are transpiring. Finally, Bolingbroke says, “Urge it no more, my Lord Northumberland” (IV.i.271); the latter replies, “The commons will not then be satisfied” (IV.i.272). And we are not.

During the ceremony of the deposition, King Richard addresses all of the nobleman in Westminster Hall, saying, “Yet you Pilates/Have here deliver’d me to my sour cross...” (IV.i.240-1). Technically, however, the king is in error as only Bolingbroke, not the noblemen, can possibly be a type of Pilate, because only he has the authority to “deliver” him to his execution. At the end of the ceremony, he

says, "Go, some of you convey him to the Tower" (IV.i.316). The "Tower" has ominous implications in the English history plays. After King Edward, Clarence and of course, Gloucester stab Prince Edward, killing him, the king commands that Queen Margaret be taken to the Tower, and she responds, saying, "Nay, never bear me hence, dispatch me here" (3 *Henry VI*, V.v.67). And, of course, Gloucester "dispatches" King Henry VI in the Tower as well as the two princes. Richard clearly understands his own fate as he talks to the Queen on a street leading to the Tower:

Think I am dead, and that even here thou takest
As from my death bed, thy last living leave.
(V.i.38-9)

And so Bolingbroke is actually the type of Pilate who condemns Richard to his "sour cross".

On another level, however, the analogy between Bolingbroke and Pilate is inaccurate. In the gospels, Pilate repeatedly made an effort to save the life of Christ whereas Bolingbroke makes no effort whatsoever to save Richard. Pilate understood that the Jewish elders accused Christ of being a criminal not because he actually was one but because they envied his popularity. Saint Matthew writes, "For he [Pilate] knew that for envy they had delivered him" (*Matthew*, 27:18). Consequently, Pilate, unlike the Jewish people, was not "persuaded" by the arguments and protestations of the Jewish elders to reject Christ. Saint Luke writes:

And Pilate, when he had called together the chief
priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them,
Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that
perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having
examined him before you, have found no fault in this
man touching those things whereof ye accuse him.
(*Luke*, 23:13-4)

The Tudor homilist, disregarding the sympathy and impartiality with which Pilate initially attempted to judge Christ, concluded only that he was a "wicked judge" (qtd. in Tillyard, 66), since in the end, he condemned Him to death. But whether Pilate was wicked or not, the manner by which he formulated his opinion of Jesus Christ is a valuable lesson for all those who are considering the characterization of King Richard II. Just as Pilate discerned the personal shortcomings of the pharisees which motivated them to slander the accused, and "examined" him for himself, we also should take heed to the subtle discrepancies with which Shakespeare undermines not only the characterizations, but also the testimonies of

the king's accusers, and formulate our own objective opinion of a character who himself may have been a victim of the "eagle-winged pride" of his own subjects. Those who do not may become members of a vicious and unreasonable mob, mindlessly shouting for the destruction of an innocent man.

I have resisted the opinions of the king's accusers and concluded that Gaunt accuses the king of murder because he, having a certain guilt for his own involvement in Gloucester's death, finds some solace in displacing that guilt upon King Richard, whom he mistakenly believes is responsible. York, I think, surrenders the king's army because he, being jealous of the Black Prince's military prowess and ashamed of his own, receives some consolation in deposing his son. And Northumberland speaks of a "degenerate king" because he is motivated by the greed of financial gain which will be his if the usurper whom he supports becomes king. I think that Shakespeare intends us to resist the strong temptation of being "persuaded" by the emotional and seemingly virtuous opinions of these characters and others whose integrity is questionable, and "examine" the accused for ourselves. In so doing, I think that we will find not necessarily that he, like Jesus Christ, has "no fault", but that he has minor or relatively insignificant faults which can hardly justify his deposition. Perhaps Gaunt is right in that England under the kingship of King Richard is not "the other Eden, demi-paradise" (II.i.42) that it may have been, relatively speaking, under the kingship of his grandfather; but it certainly is not, as the Gardener's servant alleges, a garden "full of weeds" (III.iv.44). Under the kingship of the usurping Bolingbroke, however, England becomes, so Shakespeare asserts throughout the tetralogies, "the field of Golgotha and dead man's bones" (IV.i.144).

CHAPTER IX

THE DISILLUSIONED KING

When Bolingbroke usurps King Richard's throne, Holderness asserts, he destroys not only a monarchy, but also the concept which defines it, namely the divine right of kings. Shakespeare, Holderness asserts, presents the idea of a divinely-sanctioned monarchy as being a myth or a mystifying fiction which exists only, but powerfully, in King Richard's imagination, as well as in the imaginations of those who are responsible for his defeat (71). Such an understanding of the divine right is erroneous. The writer of the homily, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, clearly states, as I have argued in the Introduction, that the two primary tenets of this philosophy are firstly, that the king is ordained or established by God and secondly, that those who rebel against him will receive to themselves a kind of "damnation". Neither the homilist nor the writers of the scriptures ever categorically state that a kingship will, of a necessity, be unconditionally preserved and/or protected. On the contrary, the Psalmist writes:

For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor the
from the west, nor from the south. But God is the
judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.
(*Psalm*, 75:6-7)

Daniel also advances this concept when he talks to King Balteshazzar, telling him that his father, King Nebuchadnezzar was reproved

till he knew that the most high God ruled in the
kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it
whomsoever he will.
(*Daniel*, 5:21b)

The Bishop of Carlisle also advocates this concept, saying:

Fear not, my lord: that Power that made you king
Hath power to keep you king in spite of all.
(III.ii.27-8)

God has "made" Richard king and He also has the power to "keep" him king, but whether He actually will exercise that power on King Richard's behalf is a matter which Carlisle does not know; indeed, he states his uncertainty, saying, "if heaven would" (III.ii.30) defend his throne, then they should be prepared militarily.

Unlike Carlisle, however, King Richard has an imperfect understanding of his divine right. Replying to Aumerle who has said that the mobilization of the royalist forces is "too remiss" (III.ii.33), he says:

Discomfortable cousin! know'st thou not
That **when** the searching eye of heaven is hid,
Behind the globe, that lights the lower world,
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen
In murders and in outrage bloody here.
(III.ii.36-40)

King Richard believes that a providential power directs the affairs of his world according to a pattern or design. The word “when”, unlike the word “if”, indicates a specified time in which God “hides” his “eye” or his face from the world that he governs, allowing the “thieves and robbers” of Bolingbroke’s rebellion to commit their crimes. In the scriptures, God hides His face or withholds His blessings because of some sin or sins which His people have committed, but King Richard does not explain why the God of his world governs it in a similar manner.

The king continues:

But **when** from under this terrestrial ball
He fires the proud tops of the eastern pines
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
Then murders, treasons and detested sins,
The cloak of night being pluck’d from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
(III.ii.41-6)

Unlike Carlisle, the king believes that God cannot ultimately choose to “hide” Himself, ignoring his dilemma, but will certainly intervene, “firing” and “darting” his power through every “guilty hole”. The idea of “guilt” indicates that King Richard believes that God’s intervention will not necessarily be of a physical, but of a moral nature, since it is designed to end the “outrage” by convicting Bolingbroke’s conscience of his wrongdoing. Indeed, he will “Stand bare and naked, trembling at [himself]”. But even though Carlisle and Aumerle think that the king is “too remiss”, trusting only in a supernatural defense of his kingdom, he himself indicates that God’s intervention can only be effective if it is in conjunction with his own efforts. He continues, saying:

So **when** this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke,
Who all this while hath revell’d in the night,
Whilst we were wandering with the antipodes,
Shall see us rising in our throne, **the east**,
His treasons will sit blushing in his face,
Not able to endure the sight of day,
But self-affrighted tremble at his sin.
(III.ii.47-53)

In the whole of the drama, these lines are the clearest indication that Shakespeare perceives King Richard as a type of Christ. Christ said, "For as the lightning cometh out of **the east**, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (*Matthew*, 24:27). King Richard's "rising" is a type of Christ's coming of which a strong militaristic presence is a primary part. Saint John writes, "And the armies which were in heaven followed him [Christ] upon white horses..." (*Revelation*, 19:14). Accordingly, King Richard has a keen interest in the royalist armies which are in England, asking Salisbury, "Welcome, my lord: how far off lies your power?" (III.ii.63). And he comforts himself after learning of the Welsh defection, saying, "I know my uncle York/Hath power enough to serve our turn" (III.ii.89-90). And finally and desperately, he asks, "Say, Scroop, where lies our uncle with his power?" (III.ii.192). For King Richard, the issue is not "if" but "when" Bolingbroke sees him "rising" with his royalist armies, then he will capitulate in a manner which again has a biblical precedent. Christ said:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in
heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth
mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in
the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.
(Matthew, 24:30)

Just as the "tribes" will "mourn" when they see Christ coming, so too, King Richard predicts, Bolingbroke will "blush" and "tremble" when he sees him coming or "rising" with his "power". It is a curious thing that the syntax of the Shakespearean and the biblical statements are almost identical: he "shall see us rising in our throne", and they "shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds". Was Shakespeare actually thinking of this verse when he wrote these lines?

King Richard has an erroneous understanding of his divine right, thinking unequivocally that God will intervene on his behalf. His statements about his invincibility against the "rough rude sea" (III.ii.54) and the "breath of worldly men" (III.ii.56) are accurate only within the context of God's intervention, which in his mind is assured. However, he concludes his speech, saying, "...**if** angels fight,/Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right" (III.ii.62). Perhaps King Richard is merely speaking in metaphorical terms, but he probably, like Christ (*Matthew*, 26:53), believes that such beings exist and are prepared to intervene on his behalf; but he now has the slightest of doubts as to whether they actually will.

When he learns that the Welsh have defected, he initially thinks that they have violated their "faith" not only to him, but to a God who was preparing to utilize them in the defense of "his Richard" (III.ii.60):

Revolt our subjects? that we cannot mend;
They break their faith to God as well as us.
(III.ii.100-1)

But when he hears of the apparent disloyalty of Bushy and Green, he increasingly suspects that God may have “broken” His “faith” to him, abandoning him to “thieves and robbers”. He says, “**If** we prevail, their heads shall pay for it” (III.ii.126). His suspicion rapidly turns to despair when he learns that Bushy and Green have been executed. His world is no longer an ordered world where an omnipotent God is directing its affairs, but a chaotic one where the “searching eye of heaven is (still and may always be) hid”; where kings are “slain in war” (III.ii.157), “haunted by...ghosts” (III.ii.158) and “poison’d by their wives” (III.ii.159). He is a broken man, “woe’s slave” (III.ii.210), who despairingly questions his beliefs which he had once thought were unshakeable.

But on the walls of Flint castle he prays, desperately attempting to accept what he thinks may be his divine fate:

O that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been,
Or not remember what I **must** be now!
(III.iii.136-9)

The word “must” connotes the idea that a plan or method, having an exactly defined goal, has been established and that only the occurrence of certain prescribed events will bring about the realization of that end. One of these events, he thinks, is his own deposition: indeed, he already speaks of his kingship in the past tense, saying, “what I have been”. But what exactly the end or goal of his personal tragedy will be, is a concept which he does not reveal, although he clearly perceives himself as having a new identity, saying, “what I must be now”. Presumably he thinks that he has been given a new and even greater office than that of just king, one in which he will fulfil what he thinks is the divine purpose.

The king then says:

Swell’st thou, proud heart? I’ll give thee scope to beat,
Since foes have scope to beat both thee and me.
(III.iii.140-1)

Previously the king had said that the Welshmen had “broken” their “faith” to him by deserting him, but now he begins to perceive even the loss of his armies not as a tragedy, but as part of the divine methodology. Just as “thieves and robbers range

abroad unseen” only when “the searching eye of heaven is hid”, so too his “foes have scope” only when God consents. But still he is not quite convinced:

What **must** the king do now? **must** he submit?
The king shall do it: **must** he be depos'd?
The king shall be contented; **must** he lose
The name of king? a' God's name, let it go.
(III.iii.143-6)

In writing the word “must” once previously and four times in these lines, Shakespeare is obviously trying to convey some message to his audience; but what? Jesus Christ, like King Richard, also repeatedly spoke the word “must” in His discourses to his disciples. Recording one of those instances, Saint Luke writes that Christ said, “The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (*Luke*, 24:7). Jesus Christ understood that his coming betrayal and execution were prescribed events of a divine plan which would lead to a certain goal, namely the redemption of humanity. After “being in an agony” (*Luke*, 22:44), He went to His death with an absolute certainty that He was following the prescribed course established by God.

Such is not the mindframe of King Richard. He has an idea that his “master” has a method which includes his betrayal and deposition, repeatedly speaking, like Christ, the word “must”; yet unlike Christ, he cannot be reconciled to that method which contradicts his own understanding of the divine right of kings. In his mind, he was destined to “rise” in the “east” in conjunction with a mighty army and a God who would “fire the proud tops of the eastern pines”, as Bolingbroke, witnessing the phenomenon, surrendered in abject shame. But now such hopes are lost and he poses a series of questions, all of which are a bitter protest against what he perceives as his divine fate. In the deposition scene, he, in responding to Bolingbroke’s question of “Are you contented to resign the crown?” (IV.i.201), waffles and says, “Ay, no; no; ay” (IV.i.201) before he finally once again accepts the divinely instigated deposition, saying assertively, not interrogatively, “I **must** nothing be” (IV.i.201). However, whereas beforehand he perceived a nobility in his fate, as did Christ, now he is resigned to a certain vanity of “nothingness” which has been assigned to him. When Northumberland insists that he read the articles of his “grievous crimes”, a disillusioned man again struggles to understand his fate: “**Must** I do so? and **must** I ravel out/My weav’d-up follies?” (IV.i.228-9). Finally, he dramatizes his own disillusionment by destroying the mirror which symbolizes the face of what he once believed.

On the street leading to the Tower, Richard is once again attempting to reconcile his shattered political idealisms with reality. He says to the Queen:

I am a sworn brother, sweet,
To grim Necessity, and he and I
Will keep a league till death.

(V.i.20-2)

The usurpation is now not just a necessity, but a “Necessity”, as if it actually is part of some noble plan; yet it is still tainted with a certain “grimness” in that he fully understands that his “death” is required. The Queen, however, is not convinced and echoes the disillusionment with which her husband has struggled, saying to him, “And **must** we be divided? **must** we part?” (V.i.81). Unconvincingly, he says, “Ay” (V.i.82), and then laments bitterly. Yet even in the midst of the personal crisis that he is experiencing, he exhibits the faintest sign of wisdom and courage:

Come, come, in wooing sorrow let's be brief,
Since, wedding it, there is such length in grief.
(V.i.93-4)

During the humiliation of the public procession, a disillusioned Richard continues his futile attempt to reclaim some semblance of his personal dignity. York says:

But dust was thrown upon his sacred head;
Which with such gentle sorrow he shook off,
His face still combating with tears and smiles,
The badges of his grief and patience,
That had not God for some strong purpose steel'd
The hearts of men, they must perforce have melted,
And barbarism itself have pitied him.
But heaven hath a hand in these events,
To whose high will we bound our calm contents.
(V.ii.30-8)

Although York recognizes that even in the processional, God was ordering the events, working towards “some strong purpose”, Richard struggles, being in “combat” with the “tears” of the “grief” of what he thinks is a meaningless deposition and the “smiles” of a “patience” with which, like York, he perceives that “heaven hath a hand in these events”. He strives and fails to “bind” his “calm contents” to what he perceives as not God’s “high”, but vulgar “will”.

Imprisoned in Pomfret Castle, Richard ultimately concludes that his deposition is not part of “some strong purpose”:

Music do I hear?
Ha, ha! Keep time: how sour sweet music is,
When time is broke, and no proportion kept!
So it is in the music of men's lives.
And here have I the daintiness of ear

To check time broke in a disorder'd string.
(V.v.41-6)

Again Richard expresses his cynicism, perceiving only a "sour" taste in what he ironically calls the "sweet music" or pattern of his fate. For Richard, "time" and "proportion", both of which are symbols for universal order, are "broken" and lost respectively. The music of the cosmic dance is now played only on a "disorder'd string" which makes "clamorous groans" (V.v.56). Richard's world is an "all hating world" (V.v.66) of chaos, which is populated by "beasts" (V.i.35) and "fiend[s]" (IV.i.270) unrestrained or worse yet, ignored by an indifferent God.

It was quite impossible for Shakespeare to allow Richard to die in such an unorthodox, even heretical mindset. After Exton stabs him, Shakespeare, protecting this troubled character even until the end, gives him a speech in which he regains not only a part of his self-esteem, but also his belief in universal order. He says, "That hand shall burn in never quenching fire/That staggers thus my person" (V.v.108-9). In Richard's restored mentality, a God who recognizes law and hierarchy will punish those who dare to "resist" the office of "His substitute". His final words reveal a reconciliation with God:

Mount, mount my soul! Thy seat is up on high;
While my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die.
(V.v.111-2)

In a kind of confession, Richard attributes his moments of ambivalence and uncertainty to his "gross flesh". His spirit, he is certain now, will "mount" upwards to the honour denied to him in an "all-hating world".

Although King Richard can never fully perceive or accept a divine methodology in his own deposition and ensuing execution, nevertheless a providential power is still directing the course of English history to a predetermined end: namely the accession of King Henry V. King Richard is a martyr or a type of Christ whose death is a "grim Necessity" in that only in this way can England receive her "mirror of all Christian kings", who not only restores his country to the military glories of King Edward III, but also gives her a queen whose son becomes the first Tudor monarch and the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth. However, hanging over the "mirror's" brilliance, is his father, King Henry IV who, having diabolically violated the universal order and usurped the throne, casts a long shadow upon the Lancastrian dynasty. To amend this fault and legitimise not only his claim to the throne, but his son's as well, Shakespeare portrays King Henry IV as a penitent king who experiences a certain remorse for what he has done. In Part Two, I

examine firstly, Bolingbroke as a type of Satan and secondly and more importantly, a sleepless character whose personal anguish is designed to evoke our sympathy.

PART TWO:

HENRY BOLINGBROKE / KING HENRY IV

CHAPTER X

A TYPE OF SATAN

When Henry Bolingbroke enters the stage in I.i., he immediately greets the king and says:

Many years of happy days befal
My gracious sovereign, my most loving liege!
(I.i.20-1)

Are these the words of a diabolical character, bent on the usurpation of a crown and the murder of a king? On the contrary, Bolingbroke's greeting appears to be that of a loyal subject who is satisfied to serve and obey his "gracious sovereign". The king, however, after receiving Mowbray's blessing, says:

We thank you both, yet one but flatters us,
As well appeareth by the cause you come.
Namely, to appeal each other of high treason.
(I.i.25-6)

Not only does King Richard reject Bolingbroke's salutation as being merely "flattery", he also insinuates that "the cause" which brings him into his presence is fraudulent. The audience may think that Bolingbroke has come to the king's palace to "appeal" or accuse Mowbray of "high treason", but King Richard suspects that he has come to accuse the king himself. Previously the king had asked Gaunt why Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray, but Gaunt, oddly enough, responded by saying that there is no threat "Aim'd at your highness" (I.i.14). Surprisingly, Gaunt understood the king's unspoken concern and futilely attempted to assuage it.

Bolingbroke, before actually accusing Mowbray, again addresses King Richard and says:

First, heaven be the record to my speech,
In the devotion of a subject's love,
Tendering the precious safety of my prince,
And free from other misbegotten hate,
Come I appellant to this princely presence.
(I.i.30-4)

Again Bolingbroke states that he is a "devoted" and loyal subject; or does he? Oddly, he says that he is "Tendering the precious safety of [his] prince". According to the Oxford dictionary, the verb "to tender" means "to offer to buy something at a stated price" (Ruse, 650). Is Bolingbroke somehow bidding for the kingship? In II.iii., as I have previously stated, Bolingbroke allures firstly Hotspur, and then Ross and Willoughby, with promises of money, saying to the latter:

...all my treasury
Is yet but unfelt thanks, which more enrich'd
Shall be your love and labour's recompense.
(II.iii.60-2)

And Bolingbroke's failure to pay his accomplices the price which he has "tendered" them is one of the primary causes of the rebellion. Additionally, why does Bolingbroke even speak about the "precious safety" of King Richard if he is not, in fact, threatened; or is he? And why does he express his "devotion" in negative terms, talking about his freedom from "misbegotten hate"? And finally, why does he wish that "Many years of happy days befall/[His] gracious sovereign"; is not the verb "befall" inappropriate, having sinister implications? Jeremiah asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (*Jeremiah*, 13:23a). Bolingbroke, like the "Ethiopian" and the "leopard", has a certain identity which can never be "changed" or even successfully hidden; the duke has attempted and failed to conceal his predatory nature. Mowbray echoes this very sentiment:

K.R. Rage must be withstood;
Give me his gage: lions make leopards tame.

Mow. Yea, but not change his spots.
(I.i.173-5)

The term "lion" which signifies the king of the beasts, is a symbol for the king himself; and "leopard" represents Bolingbroke. The king recognizes a certain wildness in Bolingbroke which he thinks that he can "tame" or control, but Mowbray warns him that he cannot "change" what may be Bolingbroke's "spots" of "misbegotten hate".

At Coventry, Bolingbroke again dubiously honours the king, saying, "Lord marshal, let me kiss my sovereign's hand,/And bow my knee before his majesty" (I.iii.46-7) and then says, "As confident as is the falcon's flight/Against a bird, do I with Mowbray fight" (I.iii.61-2). Previously, the king had compared Bolingbroke to a leopard, now Bolingbroke compares himself to a "falcon", which is another animal having violently aggressive tendencies towards its prey. Is the falcon-like duke a threat not only to Mowbray's life, but also to the "precious safety of [his] prince"? It appears so, as he, responding to the king's sentence of his banishment, says:

Your will be done; this must my comfort be,
That sun that warms you here shall shine on me,
And those his golden beams to you here lent

Shall point on me, and gild my banishment.
(I.iii.144-7)

Holderness rightly concludes that these lines are nothing more than a “veiled threat” (63). Firstly, Bolingbroke is mocking not only King Richard, saying deceitfully, “Your will be done”, but also God Himself, as these words are taken directly from the Lord’s prayer. That Bolingbroke is willing to openly and shamelessly blaspheme the Lord is hard evidence that Shakespeare portrays him as a satanic figure who “resists” divinely sanctioned authority. Secondly, the term “sun” is a symbol for the “kingship” itself and therefore, Bolingbroke is cunningly predicting that at some unspecified time in the future, he will become king and enjoy the “golden beams” of royal authority and power. Bolingbroke is a type of Satan who “himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 *Corinthians*, 11:14b). Indeed, he is a leopard, a falcon, even a wolf who appears to demonstrate a kind of angelic submission, “kissing [his] sovereign’s hand” and “bowing [his] knee” before him even as he dreams of the sun “shining” and “pointing” on him. A more honest response to the king’s sentence might resemble that of Coriolanus who, being banished, says:

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek o’th’rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air - I banish you.
(*Coriolanus*, III.iii.120-3)

Like Coriolanus, Bolingbroke regards his superior not as his “loving liege”, but as a “cur” whom he will depose; but unlike Coriolanus, he dissembles his animosity with the “craft of smiles”.

The king discerns Bolingbroke’s threat and, desiring to secure his “precious safety”, says:

Return again, and take an oath with thee,
Lay on our royal sword your banish’d hands,
Swear by the duty that you owe to God-
Our part therein we banish with yourselves-
To keep the oath that we administer;
You never shall, so help you truth and God,
Embrace each other’s love in banishment,
Nor never look upon each other’s face,
Nor never write, regret, nor reconcile
This luring tempest of your home-bred hate,
Nor never by a devised purpose meet
To plot, contrive, or complot any ill,
‘Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land.
(I.iii.178-90)

And Bolingbroke replies, saying, “I swear” (I.iii.191). A medieval knight who swears an oath must honour the commitment that he has made or face serious consequences. At Coventry, the Lord Marshal commands Mowbray to identify himself and says, “Speak truly, on thy knighthood and thy oath,/As so defend thee heaven and thy valour” (I.iii.14-5); and Mowbray, responding, says that he is the Duke of Norfolk who has come “engaged by my oath/(Which God defend a knight should violate.)” (I.iii.17-8). The Lord Marshal declares that an oath-taker is defended by heaven and Mowbray says that an oath-breaker is apparently in such jeopardy that only God can, paradoxically, defend him. Neither of the two noblemen, however, defines the actual threat from which they must be protected, but Northumberland, defending his decision to aid Bolingbroke, says:

The noble duke has sworn his coming is
 But for his own: and for the right of that
 We all have strongly sworn to give him aid;
 And let him ne’er see joy that breaks that oath!
(II.iii.148-51)

Northumberland says that a knight who violates his oath will be afflicted with a severe mental depression of “joy[lessness]”. Judging from the king’s “searching eye of heaven” speech in III.ii, I think that Northumberland is unknowingly advocating the concept of a divinely-ordered universe, since “joy[lessness] or being “self-affrighted trembl[ing] at [one’s] sin” is an ailment with which an angry God afflicts those who break His laws. That King Henry IV suffers from just such a malady is an indication that he is, among other things, an oath-breaker.

But does Bolingbroke actually violate his oath? Firstly, it should be noted that he has sworn not to form an alliance with Mowbray against King Richard and that he never does; but clearly the spirit of the oath is that he will not rebel against the king and that he does. But why does King Richard think that Bolingbroke even considers associating with a man whom he thinks is a “traitor and a miscreant” (I.i.39); or does he? King Richard has concluded that Bolingbroke’s abusing of Mowbray was indeed, as he initially stated, only flattery, and that having no ill-will towards Mowbray, as he clearly indicates in IV.i., Bolingbroke was actually accusing the king himself. Secondly, Bolingbroke has sworn not to “complot any ill,/’Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land”, and when he returns from exile, Northumberland states that Bolingbroke has not violated these conditions of the oath, saying that he has come “but for his own”. Bolingbroke slightly clarifies the vaguely auspicious meaning of Northumberland’s comment when he says to York, “As I was banish’d, I was banish’d Hereford;/But as I come, I come for

Lancaster” (II.iii.113-4). Bolingbroke is saying that he has returned from exile not to harm King Richard, but only to reclaim his inheritance; but speaking to the king at Flint Castle, however, he echoes Northumberland’s rather ambiguous declaration and says, “My gracious lord, I come but for mine own” (III.iii.196). What is “[his] own”?

Immediately after the king confiscates Gaunt’s estate, Northumberland says:

I have from le Port Blanc, a bay
In Brittany, receiv’d intelligence
That Harry Duke of Hereford, Rainold Lord Cobham...
All these well furnish’d by the Duke of Bretagne
With eight tall ships, three thousand men of war,
Are making hither with all due expedience,
And shortly mean to touch our northern shore:
Perhaps they had ere this, but that they stay
The first departing of the king for Ireland.
(II.i.277-79, 285-90)

When do Bolingbroke and his invasionary force depart from the Port Blanc? Is it possible that Bolingbroke received from the North of England, the news of the King’s judgment against his father, assembled thousands of soldiers, loaded the supplies upon the “eight tall ships” and sailed the hundreds of miles from France to Ravenspurgh during the few moments which have elapsed between the king’s departure from Ely House and Northumberland’s revelation of his “intelligence”? Of course not; Bolingbroke has obviously sailed for England well before the king confiscates his inheritance, plainly revealing his intention of usurping the throne. If, therefore, when he states that he has come for “[his] own”, he means that he has initially returned to England to recover his estate, then he is a liar since the confiscation clearly occurs only well after he has departed from Port Blanc. That Shakespeare portrays Bolingbroke as a usurper is further advanced in that he “stays” or anchors the ships at sea, waiting for the king to depart for Ireland. If Bolingbroke has returned to England only to reclaim his inheritance, why then does he avoid the king when only the king can reinstate to him what he allegedly desires? Clearly, Bolingbroke has calculated that an absent king will allow him to consolidate his power among the “poor craftsmen” (I.iv.28) and “oyster wench[es]” (I.iv.31) that he wooed with “craft of smiles” (I.iv.28) as he departed the country, saying deceitfully, “Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends” (I.iv.34). In III.ii., Scroop tells King Richard that “white-beards” and “boys” have enthusiastically received Bolingbroke back from exile, eagerly responding to his call to arm against him. After Bolingbroke is crowned however, the Archbishop of York says:

The commonwealth is sick of their own choice,
 Their over-greedy love hath surfeited.
 An habitation giddy and unsure
 Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.
 O thou fond many! with what loud applause
 Didst thou beat heaven with blessing Bolingbroke
 Before he was what thou wouldst have him be:
 And being now trimmed in thine own desires,
 Thou, beastly feeder, art so full of him
 That thou provok'st thyself to cast him up.
 (2 *Henry IV*, I.iii.87-96)

The “poor craftsmen” are never Bolingbroke’s “loving friends”, but only a means by which he realizes his unscrupulous ambition; and having once usurped the crown, he alienates them in a manner which is clearly offensive, but mysterious, as Scroop does not actually explain why the “commonwealth is sick of their own choice”. (Of course, it can be argued that York, like Ross, simply fabricates the idea of disgruntled commoners to justify his part in the civil war against the king.) When Bolingbroke states therefore, that he has come for “[his] own”, he means that he has come for the crown of England, which he, being a type of Satan, has aspired to usurp even as he embarks for his French exile.

As Northumberland and Bolingbroke ride through the wilds of Gloucestershire, Northumberland says:

These high wild hills and rough uneven ways
 Draws out our miles, and makes them wearisome;
 And yet your fair discourse hath been as sugar,
 Making the hard way sweet and delectable.
 (II.iii.4-7)

Comically, Shakespeare exposes Northumberland as being the very thing that he allegedly so fears, namely a “flatterer”. Furthermore, the playwright subtly vindicates King Richard by portraying Bolingbroke as being subjected to the “lascivious metres” (II.i.19) of a flatterer, whereas King Richard is only accused and never reduced to such an indignity. Indeed, Bolingbroke is even made to welcome Northumberland’s false praise, saying, “Of much less value is my company/Than your good words” (II.iii.19-20), revealing his criminal desire to feel the warmth of “golden beams”. But more importantly, Shakespeare challenges his audience to consider what Northumberland describes as Bolingbroke’s “fair discourse” which is as “sugar”. Van Doren thinks that Bolingbroke was reciting poetry which moved Northumberland to the extent that he praises it (71). But not only is such an interpretation only speculation, it also is incompatible with the characterization of Northumberland who is generally unromantic, responding to a

desperate Queen who pleads, “Banish us both, and send the king with me” (V.i.83), with “That were some love, but little policy” (V.i.84).

A better interpretation is that Bolingbroke was delineating his plan to usurp the throne of King Richard and promising Northumberland a financial recompense for his assistance. Before Flint Castle, Northumberland says, “Richard not far from hence hath hid his head” (III.iii.6). Why has the earl omitted King Richard’s title of authority? Responding to York’s objection, Northumberland says, “Only to be brief,/Left I his title out” (III.iii.10-1); but this explanation is unlikely because such an omission is, as York says, an offence which is punishable by death, but only in the time which “hath been” (III.iii.11), in the time when King Richard was unthreatened by a usurper and his forces. It seems that York, as well as Northumberland who is still thinking of the “fair discourse”, knows that King Richard will soon be deposed and therefore is not to be respected or feared. Indeed, when Northumberland approaches the king, he doesn’t even kneel.

Before encountering the king, Bolingbroke is portrayed as a man of authority and confidence, commanding his fellow-conspirators to “go” (III.iii.32) to Flint Castle and “deliver” (III.iii.34) a message to the king; and again he commands them to “go” (III.iii.49) while he orders his captains to “March on, and mark King Richard how he looks” (III.iii.61). Regarding the meeting with King Richard himself, he says:

Methinks King Richard and myself should meet
With no less terror than the elements
Of fire and water, when their thundering shock
At meeting tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven.
Be he the fire, I’ll be yielding water;
The rage be his, whilst on the earth I rain
My waters; on the earth, and not on him.
(III.iii.54-60)

On the one hand, Bolingbroke compares King Richard to “fire” because it is the primate of the elements, as the king is the primate of men. On the other hand Bolingbroke is emphasizing the relationship that the king, being “God’s substitute“, has with God Himself, as “fire” is a term which the biblical writers frequently apply to God. Moses, of course, writes that God appeared to him in the form of the burning bush and the writer of *Hebrews* writes, “For our God is a consuming fire” (12:29). Whereas Bolingbroke perceives King Richard as being a “fire” or a type of god, he perceives himself as being his equal, or at least his rival, namely “water”. He imagines that their meeting will be like a titanic struggle between two gods, inciting a “terror” and a “thundering shock” which “tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven”. Is Bolingbroke simply comparing the royal meeting with a rain storm,

or is he admitting that the usurpation will be an insidious attack upon the face of God Himself? In *Richard II*, Shakespeare repeatedly uses the term “heaven” or “heavens” as a synonym for the term “God”. For example, York, warning Bolingbroke, says:

Yor. Take not, good cousin, further than you should,
 Lest you mistake the heaven are o’er our heads.

Bol. I know it, uncle, and oppose not myself
 Against their will.

(III.iii.16-19)

York acknowledges that the “heavens” or God have/has a certain authority in the affairs of men, limiting the advances of those whose ambition threatens the order which He has established. Responding, Bolingbroke seems to comply with York, saying that he “opposes not” God’s or “their will”, but actually he says that he “opposes not” “[him]self” to do his own will which is apparently against God’s. Bolingbroke, then, “takes...further than [he] should”, making, as it is, war on God Himself. Moreover, a suspicious ambiguity is also attached to his comment: “Be he the fire, I’ll be yielding water”. Bolingbroke seems to say that he, being “the water”, yields to King Richard, the representative of the divine “fire”, but such a statement is illogical since water does not yield to fire; it extinguishes it. Bolingbroke is boldly declaring that he has the power to make God and the king “yield” to him.

When the two actually meet, however, a “thundering shock” is never heard, nor a “terror” ever seen.

Bol. Stand all apart,
 And show fair duty to his majesty. *He kneels down*
 My gracious lord, -

K.R. Fair cousin, you debase your princely knee
 To make the base earth proud with kissing it:
 Me rather had my heart might feel your love
 Than my unpleas’d eye see your courtesy.
 Up, cousin, up, your heart is up, I know,
 Thus high at least, although your knee be low.

(III.iii.187-195)

Just as King Richard rejects Bolingbroke’s salutation in I.i. so he rejects his “courtesy” here, angrily cutting off another false and deceitful greeting. Moreover, he states that he “knows” that “[his] heart is up” or that he, like Satan, proudly and criminally aspires to attain a higher office than the one that Providence has assigned him. Permitted to speak again, he says feebly, “My gracious lord, I come but for

mine own" (III.iii.196) and the king replies, "Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all" (III.iii.197). The king has, in effect, agreed to restore Bolingbroke to his inheritance as well as give him the throne, but instead of a god-like Bolingbroke asserting himself with a "thunderous shock" of his own power, he is overwhelmed, lapsing into a desperate insistence that he is a loyal subject of the king:

So far be mine, my most redoubted lord,
As my true service shall deserve your love.
(III.iii.198-99)

There is an obvious similarity between this episode and what transpired in Gethsemane on the night that Judas betrayed Christ. Saint John writes:

Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus, therefore knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

(*John*, 18:3-6)

As Judas approached Christ with a "band of men" carrying "weapons", so too Bolingbroke comes to King Richard with his "men of war". As Christ, in identifying Himself, agreed to comply with Judas's wishes, namely that he be arrested and taken to Pilate, so too King Richard understands and accepts Bolingbroke's unstated desires; and as Judas "went backwards", as he finally comprehended the criminal magnitude of what he was about to do, so too, Bolingbroke, on the brink of receiving "[his] own", hesitates and "falls" into an uncharacteristic docility and passiveness. Indeed, even as Christ was directing the course of His own arrest, so too King Richard is leading a speechless Bolingbroke through what he is either unable or unwilling to do:

What you will have, I'll give, and willing too;
For do we must what force will have us do.
Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?
(III.iii.206-8)

Is the king saying that he gives or Bolingbroke takes the crown? I think that the playwright allows either or perhaps both interpretations since the king vacillates between the two as his tragedy unfolds. It is the king, however, who speaks of London which, as they both know, will be the place of the deposition. But he

speaks of it rhetorically, forcing a reticent subject to reluctantly confess his criminal intentions: “Yea, my good lord” (III.iii.209), he mumbles, and the king replies, revealing his conviction that the deposition is according to a prescribed course: “Then I must not say no” (III.iii.209). Previously, the king had declared that Bolingbroke would be “self-affrighted trembl[ing] at his sin” (III.ii.53) when he saw the royal armies coming against him. Actually he was correct, but only in the sense that Bolingbroke, like Judas, is ashamed when he comes into the presence of the king and looks into the face of the one he has come to betray.

Apart from Bolingbroke’s deceitfulness, he also, like the devil, has a propensity for violence. At Flint Castle, he demands that the king repeal his banishment:

If not, I’ll use the advantage of my power,
And lay the summer’s dust with showers of blood
Rain’d from the wounds of slaughtered Englishmen:
The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke
It is, such crimson tempest should bedrench
The fresh green lap of fair King Richard’s land,
My stooping duty tenderly shall show.

(III.iii.42-8)

The images of “showers of blood” and “crimson tempests” are luridly graphic descriptions of slaughter which can only exist in the fancy of a disturbed mind. Having spoken of such violence, Bolingbroke seems to denounce it when he says, “The which, how far off from the mind of Bolingbroke/It is”; but again, Shakespeare has written another ambiguous line. Firstly, when Bolingbroke says “the which”, he may be referring to lines 42, 43 and 44 or he may be referring to “slaughtered Englishmen”. Secondly, Bolingbroke says that one of these ideas is “far off” from his mind: is he saying that he does not think or approve of using “the advantage of [his] power” to cause extensive bloodshed, or is he saying that he does not think or even care about the “Englishmen” who will be slaughtered in his criminal bid to usurp the throne? The latter interpretation is admirable, indicating a character who has only legitimate intentions; whereas the former is unconscionable, signifying a character who has the most monstrous of intentions, which are only verified when Bolingbroke says that his “stooping duty tenderly shall show” or reveal what he actually means. This is ironic because, as I have repeatedly argued, Bolingbroke only “stoops” or kneels before the king and blesses him to conceal his malicious designs. Additionally, the concept of a violent Bolingbroke is suggested also in III.iv. where the Gardener, who symbolises the Duke of Hereford, speaks in disturbingly violent tones.

And finally, Shakespeare emphasizes, almost to the point of being awkward, that Bolingbroke also exhibits the worst of Satan's vices, namely pride. During the ceremony of the deposition, Carlisle says he is "proud Hereford" (IV.i.135); the queen, lamenting on the street with her condemned husband, says he is "proud Bolingbroke" (V.i.4); York says that he is "great Bolingbroke" (V.ii.7), an "aspiring rider" (V.ii.9) on a "proud steed" (V.ii.19); and in Pomfret Castle, King Richard calls him "that proud man" (V.v.89). Before Flint Castle, the king says to his kneeling cousin:

Up, cousin, up, your heart is up, I know,
Thus high at least, although your knee be low.
(III.iii.194-5)

And finally, during the depositional ceremony itself, Bolingbroke says, "In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne" (IV.i.113). Firstly, this declaration is blasphemous since Bolingbroke associates "God's name" with what is a very unholy deed, even as his son, John of Lancaster, declares that "God" approves of his policy to deceive the rebels. (Lancaster's dubious treaty will be analyzed in Chapter XII.) Secondly, this declaration eerily resembles what Satan himself boasted, saying in "[his] heart", "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (*Isaiah*, 14:13a). Part of the syntax of the Shakespearean line is identical with that of the biblical and two of the biblical words, "ascend" and "throne" are found in Shakespeare: is this coincidence or is Shakespeare actually modelling Bolingbroke's moment of infamy upon the biblical precedent? We cannot actually know the answer to this question, but Shakespeare clearly, even painstakingly associates this character with the vice of pride, which is the very sin that motivated Lucifer to futilely attempt to usurp the sovereignty of God.

In summary, I think that Henry Bolingbroke exhibits three of the primary characteristics of the biblical Satan, namely deceit, pride and to a lesser degree violence. Whereas the characterization of King Richard can be interpreted as being either positive, as I have argued, or negative, as Bergeron and to a lesser extent, Holderness have convincingly done, the characterization of Henry Bolingbroke can, I think, only be interpreted as being negative. Stirling concludes that Bolingbroke is a pragmatist or an opportunist who merely responds to a situation which arises unexpectedly (92); but Stirling advances an opinion which may be remarkably prejudicial since he either ignores or denies what is an overwhelming body of textual, as well as testimonial evidence, which is anything but complimentary to the duke. Firstly, Shakespeare clearly portrays Bolingbroke as being a liar when he states that he is come 'for Lancaster' or the title of his

inheritance, since the text plainly reveals that when he had departed from the French port, the king had not yet confiscated his father's estate. Therefore he initially violates the terms of his banishment for another, unspecified reason. Secondly, Shakespeare repeatedly advances a less than complimentary judgment of Bolingbroke's characterization, making not less than four of the principal characters declare that he is corrupted with the satanic vice of "pride". Moreover Mowbray, the "pure soul", judges him in terms which are ambiguous, but ominous, saying, "But what thou art, God, thou, and I do know,/And all too soon (I fear) the king shall rue" (I.iii.204-5). King Richard simply denigrates "this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke" (III.ii.47); and significantly, the term "thief" is one with which Christ described the devil (*John*, 10:10a). But the most damaging testimony against Bolingbroke is made by Queen Isabella who, talking to the Gardener, says:

What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee
To make a second fall of cursed man?
(III.iv.75-6)

Why does the queen insinuate that the gardener has been directly involved in the deposition when the text only reveals that he approves of it? The queen perceives that the gardener is a type of Bolingbroke and that it is he who is the diabolical character instigating a "second fall of cursed man". That Shakespeare portrays Henry Bolingbroke as a type of Satan is an interpretation which is not irrefutable, but it is inescapable, being supported by a weighty body of textual evidence.

CHAPTER XI

THE PENITENT KING

Whereas the biblical Satan never confesses the sin of his rebellion, being steadfast in his pride, Bolingbroke is humbled by a God who finally “darts his light through every guilty hole” (*Richard II*, III.ii.43); that is, he experiences a certain remorse for having deposed and apparently murdered “God’s substitute”. The transformation of Bolingbroke’s character, however, does not begin in the final Act of *Richard II*. Instead, I will argue that Bolingbroke’s conscience is pricked in the preceding Act when the Bishop of Carlisle pronounces a homiletic curse upon him, as he prepares to ascend the throne of England.

O, forfend it, God,
That in a Christian climate souls refin’d
Should show so heinous, black, obscene a deed!
I speak to subjects, and a subject speaks,
Stirr’d up by God thus boldly for his king.
My Lord of Hereford here, whom you call king,
Is a foul traitor to proud Hereford’s king,
And if you crown him, let me prophesy,
The blood of English shall manure the ground,
And future ages groan for this foul act.
(IV.i.129-38)

Why does Bolingbroke allow Carlisle to say these things? Why does he not immediately interrupt, condemn and execute Carlisle as he did to the two other vocal dissidents to his rule, Bushy and Green? I think that as Carlisle rebukes the noblemen, warning them not to crown “the foul traitor”, Bolingbroke is ashamed and, like Judas, begins to comprehend the “obscenity” of his “deed”. Just as Adam would not interrupt God when He was sentencing him to a life of toil, so too Bolingbroke listens to and agrees with the terrible judgment of a man “stirr’d up by God” (IV.i.133). In the next Act, the usurper voices his guilt when he tells the desperate Duchess of York, pleading for her traitorous Aumerle, “I pardon him, as God shall pardon me” (V.iii.131). Although Bolingbroke does not clearly specify the transgression for which God will pardon him, it is reasonably obvious that he is referring to the usurpation.

Having railed on the deponents in a speech which comprises more than thirty lines, Carlisle is finally addressed by Northumberland who says:

Well have you argued, sir, and, for your pains,
Of capital treason we arrest you here.
My lord of Westminster, be it your charge

To keep him safely till his day of trial.

(IV.i.150-3)

Why does Northumberland consign a bishop accused of “capital treason” into the custody of a fellow churchman who shares Carlisle’s political ideology? Indeed, Westminster is executed in Act V for being the “grand conspirator” (V.vi.19). And what does he mean when he tells Westminster to “keep him safely”. Does he also agree with the bishop, desiring to “keep” or preserve not only him, but his ideology as well? Moreover, Carlisle is permitted to remain in Westminster Hall and witness the “woeful pageant”, and afterwards Bolingbroke, Hotspur, Northumberland and all of the other conspirators exit, leaving him in the company of the Abbot and Aumerle, to whom he prophesies once again:

The woe’s to come; the children yet unborn
Shall feel this day as sharp to them as thorn.

(IV.i.322-3)

And Carlisle almost certainly attends the supper at Westminster’s home where the abbot devises a plan to “rid the realm of the pernicious blot” (IV.i.325). It seems likely that Bolingbroke knows what the trio are talking about and even plotting; but just as he was ashamed to confront the king at Flint Castle, so too he is, as King Richard predicted that he would be, too “self-affrighted” (*Richard II*, III.ii.53) to confront or hinder the “holy clergymen” (IV.i.324).

When Hotspur delivers Carlisle to King Henry IV for sentencing, he clearly expects the king to pronounce a “kingly doom” (V.vi.23) upon the dissenter, but he is undoubtedly surprised when the king does not sentence, but blesses Carlisle, saying, “Choose out some secret place, some reverend room,/More than thou hast, and with it joy thy life” (V.vi.25-6). When King Henry pardons the bishop, he legitimises his opinions of the deposition and disgraces all of those who were involved. Ashamed, the young Hotspur may then remember the zealous bishop beseeching him and saying, “Prevent it [the usurpation], resist it, let it not be so,/Lest child, child’s children, cry against you ‘woe!’ (IV.i.148-9). Indeed, in *Henry IV*, Hotspur defies the usurper by not delivering his prisoners to him and says:

Shall it for shame be spoken in these days,
Or fill up chronicles in time to come,
That men of your nobility and power
Did gage them both in an unjust behalf,
(As both of you, God pardon it, have done)
To put down Richard, that sweet lovely rose,
And plant this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke?

(1.I.iii.170-6)

Curiously, Hotspur, who is clearly implicated in the usurpation, refuses to acknowledge his involvement in it, accusing only his associates of wrongdoing. And then in the rebel camp near Shrewsbury, Hotspur, speaking to Sir Walter Blunt, attempts to justify his father's involvement in the deposition, saying:

With tears of innocency, and terms of zeal,
My father, in kind heart and pity mov'd,
Swore him assistance, and perform'd it too.
(1.IV.iii.63-5)

Such an interpretation of Northumberland's character is, of course, ludicrous, being totally alien to the portrait of him which is depicted in the text. I think it reveals a confused, young man who is struggling to resolve the conflicting ideas of the deposition which are troubling his mind. In one respect, he thinks of Bolingbroke as a victim whom his father justly assisted, but in another he thinks of him as "this thorn, this canker, Bolingbroke" (1.I.iii.176) who has usurped the throne of the "sweet lovely rose" (1.I.iii.175). He, like Bolingbroke, cannot forget the opinions of the patriotic bishop.

In the final scene of *Richard II*, Bolingbroke expresses a feeling of remorse when he says, "I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,/To wash this blood off from my guilty hand" (V.vi.49-50). In this instance, Bolingbroke speaks for the first of many times of his desire to participate in a crusade. Holderness insists that such references are merely Machiavellian ploys which are designed to appease the unsettled minds of those subjects who question the legitimacy of the Lancastrian rule (90). If such references were minimal and spoken only in the presence of the lords, then the Cultural Materialist's opinion would be very convincing. But as it is, King Henry IV constantly and desperately speaks of the Holy Land, compelling us to believe that he is sincere. Black, although certainly interpreting the Lancasters in a Machiavellian light, agrees: "The ideas of the Holy Land, of pilgrimage, crusading, and penitence, have been in Henry's imagination too long and too deeply for their presence to be accounted for solely in terms of Machiavellian policy" (25). Indeed, King Henry confesses that the incriminating blood is on his "guilty hand".

In the first scene of *1 Henry IV*, an exhausted King Henry is speaking to the Earl of Westmoreland in the London palace.

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
Find we a time for frightened peace to pant,
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
To be commenc'd in stronds afar remote.

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood,
No more shall trenching war channel her fields,
Nor bruise her flowerets with the armed hoofs
Of hostile paces.

(1.I.i.1-9)

Holderness interprets this part and the remainder of King Henry's speech as a clear-sighted political analysis of war as being the natural and inevitable condition of a feudal nation. According to Holderness, the disputed succession and friction within King Henry's realm are not the work of Providence invoking a retribution upon a usurper, but simply the operation of certain inevitable laws of history (90). Although Holderness does not actually define the term, "laws of history", he does say that a continual conflict and tension between the feudal nobility and the crown of medieval England was necessitated by the war-happy philosophies inherent in both chivalry and knighthood (90). Certainly, the relationship between these two historical classes was not always harmonious, as the necessity of the signing of the Magna Carta clearly reveals, but whether the historical king Henry IV or any other English king or queen actually believed that civil war was a natural and inevitable phenomenon, seems to be an assertion which cannot be easily supported by the historical evidence; but then I have not examined all of the pertinent data (has Holderness?), so this particular part of Holderness's historicism will not be challenged.

I will, however, challenge or at least suggest an alternative to Holderness's interpretation of the syntax of the text of King Henry's discourse itself. Holderness writes that King Henry "pants" and "breathes short-winded accents of new broils"; that he invokes and creates civil war in an effort to control the nobles' discontent until the Lancastrian dynasty is established (91). But I think that the first clause, "to pant and breathe short-winded accents of new broils" modifies not the object of the verb, "time", but the object of the preposition, "peace". King Henry then is not an instigator or a crafty politician directing the course of events according to his own preconceived policy, but a passive spectator who disconcertedly witnesses "frighted peace" panting and breathing news of even more war. I am not denying Holderness's reading of the text, but I am suggesting that Shakespeare deliberately creates a structural ambiguity within this line, which allows for an alternate reading and interpretation.

Another aspect of King Henry's opening discourse which should be noted is the number of times (three) the words "no more" are repeated. Perhaps King Henry, whose biblical knowledge is not insignificant, is thinking of a verse in the *Revelation*:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor
crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the
former things are passed away.

(*Revelation*, 21:9)

Saint John, having witnessed a vision of the Great Tribulation and the terrible plagues and hardships which that entailed, finally received a vision of a “new heaven and a new earth”. It was told to him that in this new order of things there would be “no more” death or sorrow. Likewise, King Henry, passing through a tribulation of sorts, dreams of that time in which there will be no more bloodshed or the bruising of “flowerets”. Whether he attributes the “trenching war” to his own misdoings is not stated here, but I think that he is clearly being transformed from being the diabolical character that he has been previously, into a character who longs for peace. On another level, the longing for a “new earth” in which there is “no more death” may be the voice of the playwright himself, anticipating the future of his own country in which a “new England” under the relatively tolerant reign of Queen Elizabeth is finally established; where the stable and legitimate government of the Tudors has ended the War of the Roses and the Virgin Queen has simultaneously repelled the invasionary force of a foreign nation and permitted Englishmen to freely read the translations of the Bible for themselves, without the fear of being tied to a wooden stake and burned to death.

When the king and Prince Hal finally meet together in the palace, the king dismisses the lords and nobles and says to him:

I know not whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done,
That, in his secret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement and a scourge for me;
But thou dost in thy passages of life
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance, and the rod of heaven,
To punish my mistreadings.

(1.III.ii.4-11)

That King Henry is convinced that his son is a prodigal is a theme which is advanced throughout both parts of *Henry IV*. Struggling to understand the causes of Hal's apparent delinquency, the king thinks of an angry God who is punishing him for “some displeasing service [he himself has] done” and for his “mistreadings”. Although the king does not specify the nature of his faults, we may assume that he is referring to the usurpation and the regicide. Certainly if the new king now acknowledges the legitimacy of the doctrine of the divine right and

consequently his apparent transgression of it, we may also reasonably conclude that he would experience a sense of guilt, which the imagery of “hot vengeance” and the “rod of heaven” betrays as his mindset. And after the prince offers an explanation for his controversial behaviour, the king exclaims, “God pardon thee!” (1.III.ii.29). This exclamation is ironic because, apart from several instances of lying (which is a vice inherent within the Lancastrian family), the Prince has not committed any offences for which he needs a divine pardon. Instead, the king who is still obviously thinking and speaking of the expiation of some as yet unspecified guilt, may actually be talking of himself.

In 2 *Henry IV*, King Henry, wearing a nightgown, enters a room in the palace of Westminster and says in soliloquy:

O sleep! O gentle sleep!
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down
And steep my senses in forgetfulness?
(2.III.i.5-8)

The king is experiencing a condition of insomnia which, according to Solomon, is an indication of a man who is alienated from God. Solomon writes that a man who finds the wisdom which is contained within the law of God will receive a particular reward:

When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea
thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.
(*Proverbs*, 3:24)

But King Henry does not have a “sweet” sleep and so we conclude that the king has a troubled conscience because he has not obeyed one or more of God’s laws. King Henry does not confess any transgression, the thought of which interrupts his repose; indeed he seems to be in ignorance, asking “sleep” how he has “frighted” it, but we know that he has violated the dictates contained within *Romans 13*, and it may be the painful remembrance of this scripture, combined with that of Carlisle’s disturbing prophecy, which causes him to seek “forgetfulness”.

In the same scene, Warwick enters and King Henry reveals to him that he is worried about the state of his kingdom:

Then you perceive the body of our kingdom,
How foul it is; what rank diseases grow,
And with what danger, near the heart of it.
(2.III.i.38-40)

Tillyard has pointed out that the likening of human government to a body is a fundamental concept of the doctrine of the planes of correspondence (17), which itself stems from the theory of the divine right of kings. King Henry, if not subscribing to this ideology, is at least contemplating it. When Warwick then mentions the name of Northumberland the rebel, King Henry, already distracted and perturbed, actually prays to God!

O God! that one might read the book of fate
And see the revolution of the times...
The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
What perils past, what crosses to ensue
Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.
(2.III.i.45-6, 54-7)

Curiously, King Henry has become like King Richard who had said, "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground/And tell sad stories of the death of kings" (III.ii.155-6). Comparing the two utterances proves a vindication of what may have initially appeared to be an incompetent King Richard, paralysed with fear, since even King Henry who, before the usurpation, acted only with confidence and resolution, also experiences a debilitating sorrow. But unlike King Richard, who regains his composure to oppose his antagonist, King Henry is deteriorating: previously he desired only sleep, but now he is praying for death. Moreover, he regrets the "fate" or the course which his life has taken. What is the cause of the king's disconcertment?

Finally he mentions the name of "Richard" (2.III.i.58), which he has undoubtedly been pondering throughout this and the previous play. Having spoken his name, he is overwhelmed by a sense of his own guilt and desperately attempts to justify himself by likening himself to Christ.

It is but eight years since
This Percy was the man nearest my soul,
Who like a brother toil'd in my affairs
And laid his love and life under my foot.
(2.III.i.60-3)

Just as Hotspur, in an attempt to justify himself, grossly distorted the character of his father, so too King Henry describes the intimacy of his relationship with Northumberland in terms which are unsupported by the text of *Richard II*. Indeed, I have previously suggested that this association of "brotherhood", as King Henry now calls it, was founded not upon "love" but upon the promises of monetary recompense which were never realized. Unable to forget the part that he played in the deposition of an anointed king, King Henry finds solace for his disturbed conscience by fancifully thinking that he is not a "foul traitor", but a type of Christ betrayed by a Judas-like friend.

Finally ending his prayer, he turns to Northumberland and speaks of King Richard again:

When Richard with his eye brimful of tears,
Then check'd and rated by Northumberland,
Did speak these words, now prov'd a prophecy?
"Northumberland, thou ladder by the which
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne;"
(2.III.i.67-71)

At this point, the king is moved with sympathy and compassion for the deceased king whose eyes, he remembers, were "brimful of tears". But curiously, King Henry corrupts the speech that King Richard actually spoke by substituting the phrase "cousin Bolingbroke" for Richard's "mounting Bolingbroke". The king is emphasising the intimacy, either real or imagined, which existed between the two cousins because he now, in his disturbed mentality, perceives himself as a type of Judas who betrayed his own cousin and friend, the king. In an attempt to expiate this guilt he then colours reality with a fanciful reconstruction of his earlier motives:

Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,
But that necessity so bow'd the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss.
(III.i.72-4)

Is this an accurate assessment of the Bolingbroke who is depicted in *Richard II*? I have argued that Bolingbroke is not a deliverer who is "compelled" by "necessity" to rescue the state from inept government, but a type of Satan, whose cold, calculated ambition from the very first scene of *Richard II*, has been to usurp the throne of King Richard. The king's denial of what is a viable judgment of his original intentions is another piece of evidence to support the premise that the king's diabolical nature is being transformed.

Regaining his composure, King Henry finishes the reciting of King Richard's prophecy:

"The time shall come," thus did he follow it,
"The time will come, that foul sin, gathering head,
Shall break into corruption;" - so went on,
Foretelling this same time's condition
And the division of our amity.
(2.III.i.75-9)

This quotation of King Richard's prophecy is remarkable for two reasons: firstly, the king has memorised almost verbatim these words that King Richard spoke to Northumberland in the street leading to the Tower. Why has he done this? I think that the king believes that King Richard's doctrine of divine retribution is true; that

an angry God is actually punishing him for his “foul sin”. Secondly, it is perhaps even more extraordinary that Northumberland has memorised Richard’s speech, and then either written it down and given it to the king, or recited it to him. (Others, such as the former Queen, also heard Richard say these things, but since none of them but Northumberland have access to the king, it is only reasonable to assume that he informed the king of this phenomenon.) Whether Northumberland, seemingly so interested in Richard’s doctrine of divine retribution that he memorizes it, is also experiencing some transformation of his Machiavellian character, is a theme which is well beyond the scope of this thesis; but he does refrain from a participation in the battle of Shrewsbury, even to the point of imperiling his own son, and his “let order die” speech in 2.I.i. is a lamentation of the political chaos for which he apparently accepts some responsibility. Regardless of Northumberland’s characterization, however, King Henry seems to regret his part in the usurpation.

Holderness would not agree with me. In his view, the king is not advocating a “providential pattern of metaphysical consequences”, but a Marxist historiography which says that feudal class conflict is a “necessity”. According to Holderness, the feudal nobility, influenced by the philosophies of militant chivalry, must have conflict not only amongst themselves, but with a monarchy which, attempting to subdue them, affronts their “honour” (93-4,101-2). To support this premise, Holderness indirectly refers to the previously cited passage of Henry’s “necessity” and “compulsion” speech, and a dialogue spoken by the king and Warwick. Perhaps Warwick advocates a Marxist historiography, speaking of the “necessary form” (2.III.i.87) of class conflict, but King Henry asks, “Are these things then necessities?/Then let us meet them like necessities” (2.III.i.93-4). Attempting to clarify his own uncertainty, the king is asking a question, not confidently stating a political doctrine; and the response with which he answers his own question is also evidence of his own personal bewilderment, since he is only resolved to meet “these things”, which I presume are the civil wars, as if they were not actually necessities, but “like” necessities. At the very least, the king is ambiguous.

At the end of his conversation with Warwick, King Henry once again speaks of the ‘Holy Land’, and in IV.iv. he reveals to his lords the detailed plan by which he will kill pagans in the “higher fields” and yet govern his kingdom back in England. His intention of going to Jerusalem is quite serious, but it is his fit which will presently occupy my attention. Having received the news of the cessation of the civil wars, the king says:

I should rejoice now at this happy news
And now my sight fails, and my brain is giddy.

O me! come near me, now I am much ill.
(2.IV.iv.109-11)

King Saul was another king who suffered from a severe mental disorder which he attempted to alleviate by listening to the music that David played on his harp:

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God
was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played
with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well,
and the evil spirit departed from him.
(1 Samuel, 16:23)

Similarly, Shakespeare makes King Henry say:

Let there be no noise made, my gentle friends:
Unless some dull and favourable hand
Will whisper music to my weary spirit.
(2.IV.v.1-3)

Unlike the Biblical writer, Shakespeare does not specify the kind of music to which the dying king listens. However, since the royal musician, like David, plays whatever instrument he has with “his hand”, we may reasonably speculate that he, like David, has a stringed instrument. (It was probably a lute as the repertory of the Elizabethan theatre did not include a harp (Cochrane)). Not only do King Henry and King Saul listen to a similar type of music, King Henry’s “weary spirit”, like King Saul’s, is “refreshed” or soothed by the melodies: indeed the former falls into such a profound sleep that the prince thinks he is dead. Of course, music that soothes the soul is a literary commonplace, but that Shakespeare even remotely compares King Henry to King Saul is significant because the latter was a man who lamented that his transgressions alienated him from God. After the prophet Samuel rebuked him for neglecting to obey God’s commandment and destroy all of the Amalekites and their sheep and oxen, Saul responded and said, “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord” (1 Samuel, 15:24a). It seems that Shakespeare is suggesting that a “giddy” King Henry has also “sinned” and “transgressed” God’s law.

And finally, when the king awakes and discovers that his crown is gone, he rebukes two of his sons, Humphrey of Gloucester and the Duke of Clarence:

See, sons, what things you are!
How quickly nature falls into revolt
When gold becomes her object!
(2.IV.v.63-5)

Of course, a king who has usurped a crown and assassinated a king should be suspicious and wary of others, thinking that they also are plotting to undo him; but King Henry IV is obsessed with the thought of his own victimization, thinking that not only Northumberland, but now even his own sons are plotting to usurp what he calls the “strange-achieved gold” (IV.v.70): a term which reveals the guilt with which he now regards the crown. But even more disturbing is the analogy that he conceives, likening himself to a bee:

When, like the bee, culling from every flower the virtuous sweets,
Our thighs with wax, our mouths with honey, packed,
We bring it to the hive; and like the bees,
Are murdered for our pains.

(2.IV.v.73-7)

There is not the slightest evidence to support the king’s accusation that Gloucester and Clarence are parricidal. On the contrary, they are genuinely sympathetic towards their father when he has his fit, saying compassionately, “Comfort, your majesty! O my royal father!” (IV.iv.112). Is the murder he’s imagining not his own but King Richard’s?

The imagery of death is paramount in the king’s chastisement of Prince Hal:

What! canst thou no forbear me half an hour?
Then get thee gone and dig my grave thyself,
And bid the merry bells ring to thine ear
That thou art crowned, not that I am dead.
Let all the tears that should bedew my hearse
Be drops of balm to sanctify thy head:
Only compound me with forgotten dust;
Give that which gave thee life unto the worms.

(2.IV.v.108-115)

To conclude as the king does, that Hal is impatient to become king and cannot “forbear” or tolerate his father’s life is another of the king’s erroneous judgments of his sons, which further develops the theme of his own guilt-induced phobias. The king “bid[s] the merry bells ring (not) to [the prince’s] ear” but to his own, since the thought of his own death is the “balm” to (finally) sanctify [his] head”. He desires to be compounded with “forgotten dust” because it is only in death that he will finally achieve that state of “forgetfulness” which he so desired in 2.III.i. Like Judas Iscariot, King Henry IV has a guilt which only his own death can appease.

The extreme mental duress that the king suffers is designed to evoke the sympathy of an audience which is slowly being reconciled to the “foul traitor”. Shakespeare accelerates this process by developing a certain altruism within a

character who has previously been only proud and ambitious. To the prince, King Henry reveals that he is concerned only with what other men thought of him:

And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dress'd myself in such humility
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king.
(1.III.ii.50-4)

On his deathbed, however, King Henry voices a value system which is contrary to his earlier declaration. Speaking to Prince Hal, he says:

For the fifth Harry from curb'd license plucks
The muzzle of restraint, and the wild dog
Shall flesh his tooth in every innocent.
O my poor kingdom! sick with civil blows.
(2.IV.v.130-33)

The king disregards the "loud shouts" and "salutations" with which his countrymen, or as he now sympathetically refers to them, "every innocent", once praised him, and concerns himself primarily with the welfare of not only their lives, but his "poor kingdom" as well. Pierce concurs, saying that he is nobler than the rebels since he recognizes and laments the disorder in his kingdom, even as he attempts to restore the political body by reaffirming the principles of royal inheritance and heroic rule which were the basis of the past glories of Edward III (51). Shakespeare is transforming the usurper's character so that the audience, initially repulsed by not only his proud countenance but by what Carlisle calls "so heinous, black, obscene a deed", namely the usurpation, can slowly accept him and ascribe a certain legitimacy to his kingship.

After Prince Hal explains to the king why he took his crown, the king exclaims:

O my son!
God put it in thy mind to take it hence,
That thou mightst win the more thy father's love,
Pleading so wisely in excuse of it.
(2.IV.v.176-9)

Those who are familiar with the history books of the Old Testament will immediately perceive a similarity between the king's exclamation, "O my son" and "my son" (2.IV.v.182) and the exclamation that King David uttered upon learning of the murder of his son: "O my son Absalom, O Absalom my son, my son" (2 *Samuel*, 19:4). Such an interpretation is admittedly subjective and so I appeal to Vickers who asserts that a reader should have the freedom to interpret Shakespeare

as he will, provided that he does not distort the text (440). I do not think that Shakespeare, who was obviously well-read in the Old Testament, wrote this line in ignorance of the similarities between it and what is one of the better known verses in the whole of the Old Testament. By comparing King Henry to a biblical character, whose affection for his son is unquestioned, Shakespeare suggests that for the first time in the tetralogy, King Henry has gained a confidant to whom he can impart his most intimate thoughts. Giving a "father's love" to the prince, King Henry will now reveal to him, not in degrees and stages as he has done previously, but openly, those secret contemplations which have so perturbed his mind from the "woeful pageant" even to his dying breath:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown.
(2.IV.v.182-4)

The king finally confesses that he usurped the crown and then reiterates his guilt by saying, "How I came by the crown, O God, forgive" (IV.vi.217). The old, sick man clearly expresses a remorse, and even a regret for his transgression against what he now thinks is a divinely sanctioned institute.

But he also reveals an opinion which seems to contradict his pious attitude. Contemplating his untrustworthy associates whose "stings and teeth [are] newly ta'en out" (IV.v.204), he says that he had purposed

To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
May waste the memory of the former days.
(2.IV.v.209-14)

Remarkably, Holderness ignores the two previously quoted confessions of the king and focuses exclusively on these lines, concluding that they define the true nature of Henry's crusade (90). Black, for reasons cited previously, disagrees; yet this revelation of the king's character is disturbing because it almost seems to contradict the sincerity of his previous ejaculations. Who is King Henry IV? Is he a Machiavellian or a Christian prince, or does Shakespeare simply create an enigma which is impossible to explain?

In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke is, among other things, a pragmatist who efficiently evaluates any given situation in which he finds himself and reacts accordingly. He realises that to win the allegiance of his future subjects, most of

whom accept the divine right of their king, he must proffer a false allegiance to King Richard and insist that the king resigns the crown. He further realises that to consolidate his political power, he must demystify the person of his predecessor; so he subjects King Richard to a universal humiliation, parading him in the streets of London before the jeering crowds. He understands that to win the allegiance and respect of the compulsive Hotspur, he must not be as he has been, “smooth as oil, soft as young down” (1.I.iii.7), but stern and severe: so he demands Hotspur’s prisoners, even threatening the powerful nobleman. The king realises that the primary goal of the rebels will be to kill him, so he attempts to confuse and deceive them by dressing several of his subjects in royal attire. Although he invokes God to “befriend” (1.V.i.120) his army, he has not neglected a practical military strategy, having divided the royalist army into three parts, each of which has marched on separate days and met at Bridgenorth (1.III.ii.170-8); likewise, after the battle of Shrewsbury, he divides the victorious army into two parts, one of which under the command of Lancaster and Westmoreland will go to York and suppress the rebellion there; the other, led by the prince and himself, will oppose the rebels in Wales (I.V.v.34-40). Although he is convinced that Hal is a prodigal, yet he can still discern other aspects of his nature:

He hath a tear for pity and a hand
Open as day for melting charity;
Yet, notwithstanding, being incens’d, he’s flint;
As humorous as winter, and as sudden
As flaws congealed in the spring of day.
(2.IV.iv.31-5)

He realises that going to the Holy Land presents certain logistical and political problems which he ably addresses:

Our navy is address’d, our power collected,
Our substitutes in absence well invested,
And every thing lies level to our wish.
(2.IV.iv.5-7)

Finally, regarding his counsel to Hal to “busy giddy minds/With foreign quarrels”, I think that the king sincerely believes that the crusade will expiate what he now considers to be his crime of usurpation; but being a shrewd and practical man (his penitence has not cancelled out this part of his character) he also recognizes another, secondary benefit of such an enterprise: the busying of those minds which will continually question his claim to the throne. The king is not necessarily a hypocrite, but an idealist who thinks in the manner of a realist.

I have up to this point in my thesis examined those parts of the text which are generally favourable to my premise of King Henry's transformation; but unlike Greenblatt who, as Vickers unanswerably and comically alleges, engages in a character assassination of Prince Hal, ignoring more than ninety percent of the text and selecting only those negative and trivial aspects of the play which support his thesis (258-9), I will now turn to a new chapter which addresses those instances in the play which do not correspond neatly with my point of view. As I stated in the Introduction, I am only prepared to state categorically that Shakespeare was an Elizabethan who accepted the broadest and most general principles of the biblical philosophy of government. He certainly was not a medieval chronicler who portrays history in an orthodox or pedantic manner; neither was he a radical ideologist who was advancing an amoral historiography. Indeed, I do not agree with Holderness when he hints and suggests that the History Plays plainly reveal a Shakespeare who has abandoned the concept of a divinely-instituted world order, where "conniving hypocrites" and pragmatists succeed and the Blunt-like idealists die, having only what Falstaff calls a "grinning honour" which mocks those it has deceived. Although Falstaff, the ultimate conniver, is permitted to repeatedly rubbish the values of the Lord Chief Justice and others, Shakespeare ultimately dismisses him and perhaps even his philosophy when King Henry V is made to say to him, "I know thee not old man" (2.V.v.48). Speaking the parable of the Ten Virgins, Christ said that the bridegroom does not admit the five foolish virgins into the wedding feast, saying, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (*Matthew*, 25:12). King Henry V, like the bridegroom, is clearly portrayed as a type of Christ who condemns what even Shakespeare himself may think is a "foolish" Falstaff.¹ That Shakespeare, however, creates certain aspects of the characterization of King Henry IV which seem to advance the concept of a hypocritical character who only falsely acknowledges a universal code of morality, does not threaten the validity of my argument, but simply testifies to the the genius of a playwright who was sympathetic to the traditions of his own age, but was also influenced, or at least conscious of alternate systems of thinking.

¹ In the endnote of Chapter XIV, I expound upon these ideas.

CHAPTER XII

THE HYPOCRITICAL KING

I have argued previously that Carlisle's rebuke in IV.i. of *Richard II* is the beginning of the pricking of Bolingbroke's conscience. I have also argued that Bolingbroke's confession to the Duchess of York in V.iii. is another indication of Bolingbroke's transforming character. If my interpretation is accurate, why does the keeper, responding to Richard's command to taste his food, speak these disturbing lines: "My lord, I dare not: Sir Pierce of Exton, who lately came from the king, commands the contrary" (*Richard II*, V.v.100-1). Subtly, yet clearly, Shakespeare is suggesting that the king is somehow involved in a plot to poison Richard. If King Henry is sincerely repentant, why is he now planning a murder?

Initially I thought that this question was unanswerable, but if we again consider the biblical precedent, then we see that it is actually possible for a man to be a righteous murderer. King David, whom God said was a "man after [his] own heart" (*Acts*, 13:22b), having impregnated the wife of Uriah, made two desperate and vain attempts to rectify his dilemma, before he finally and reluctantly resorted to the murder of the Hittite. Likewise, King Henry, having usurped the throne, has some remorse for what he has done, but realising that the usurpation, like an undesirable pregnancy, is irreversible, he perseveres in his criminal behaviour, even against the inclinations of his own will, and commits a murder which is the logical and necessary conclusion of his initial crime. He says to Exton who presents him with the coffined Richard:

They love not poison that do poison need,
Nor do I thee: though I did wish him dead,
I hate the murderer, love him murdered.
(*Richard II*, V.vi.38-40)

But even if Shakespeare portrays King Henry in this particular scene, as a type of David, still we are confronted with a reprehensible character who not only consorts with a Joab-like Exton, but resorts to the reprehensible act of poisoning an anointed king.

One of the unique qualities of the second tetralogy is the number of instances in which Shakespeare invites the audience to formulate a judgment of one of the characters, based not upon what we the audience actually witness him doing or saying, but upon what another character, usually an enemy, says of him. In the first part of my thesis, I argue that those readers who disapprove of King Richard do so because they are swayed or even deceived by the testimonies of certain unscrupulous or undiscerning men. Whether Hotspur, who testifies against King

Henry, is also a spurious witness is a question which cannot be answered conclusively. Speaking of the “ingrate and caker’d Bolingbroke” (1.I.iii.137), he says:

Revenge the jeering and disdain’d contempt
Of this proud king, who studies day and night
To answer all the debt he owes to you
Even with bloody payment of your death.
(1.I.iii.183-6)

Does King Henry “study day and night” devising a plan to destroy the Percies? On the one hand, we cannot answer this question definitively because the king is never actually portrayed in the act of saying or doing just this thing; but on the other hand, Hotspur has two grievances which might motivate him to make such a dangerous, but possibly viable accusation. (We recall that when Gaunt accused King Richard of the murder of a nobleman, he, in consequence, forfeited his title and his property, his life only being spared because he was so near death.) Firstly, the king has almost certainly neglected to pay the Percies the monetary reward that he promised to pay them in the wilds of Gloucestershire for the assistance they rendered him in the deposition. Hotspur, speaking to two of the other conspirators, his father and his uncle, mentions “the debt he owes to you” (1.I.iii.185). He also refers to the “unthankful king” (1.I.iii.136) and the “forgetful man” (1.I.iii.161) and says:

Why, what a candy deal of courtesy
This fawning greyhound did proffer me,
Look, 'when his fortune came to age,'
And 'gentle Harry Percy,' and 'king cousin.'
(1.I.iii.251-4)

And before the battle of Shrewsbury, he says sarcastically to Blunt, “The king is kind, and well we know the king/Knows at what time to promise, when to pay” (IV.iii.52-3). Perhaps the king’s failure to pay the Percies their “thirty pieces of silver” is an indication, as Hotspur insinuates, that he ultimately intends to destroy them, because he must certainly know that such an insult will provoke his warlike allies. Worcester says to him:

Whereby we stand opposed by such means
As you yourself have forg’d against yourself,
By unkind usage, dangerous countenance,
And violation of all faith and troth,
Sworn to us in your younger enterprise.
(1.V.i.67-71)

If we continue in this line of thinking that the king has deliberately “forg’d” or instigated the civil war “against himself”, then we may also speculate that he allows Carlisle to speak his prophecy to goad the Percies into rebellion. His speeches of exhaustion and care are still sincere, being simply a natural human reaction to an effective, yet murderous strategy for the consolidation of his political power.

The second grievance which may provoke Hotspur to risk his life and reveal the plot of the king to kill the Percies, is the king’s refusal to ransom the captured Edmund Mortimer. King Henry says he is “revolted Mortimer” (1.I.iii.92), a traitor who purposely led a royalist army to its own destruction. Hotspur, on the other hand, claims that he is a “noble” and “valiant” warrior who fought single-handedly against the king’s greatest enemy, the “damn’d Glendower” (1.I.iii.83). Although Hotspur entreats the king for Mortimer with “proviso an exception” (1.I.iii.78), the character who is depicted in the text is one whose inclinations coincide with the king’s judgment. Suspiciously, Mortimer says that Glendower, who can “call spirits from the vasty deep” (1.III.i.51), is a “worthy gentleman” (1.III.i.162); he even marries Glendower’s daughter and enjoys a position of respect and authority as he presides over the council of the conspirators. Our interpretation of this character is complicated, however, when Worcester claims that Richard named Mortimer to be his successor. Northumberland repeatedly but unconvincingly assures Hotspur that he himself actually heard the proclamation, and Hotspur concludes that the king will forfeit Mortimer, not because he is a traitor, but because he poses a threat to the consolidation of his newly established power:

Nay, then, I cannot blame his cousin king,
That wished him [Mortimer] on the barren mountains starve.
(1.I.iii.158-9)

Why King Henry will not ransom Mortimer is, in the end, unknown. Although Hotspur is convinced that the king’s refusal to honour whatever commitment he may have made to Mortimer is an indication of the malicious designs that he has towards the house of Percy, he is a “wasp-stung and impatient fool” whose judgments of the king may be passionately unreliable. His contention, however, that the king has not paid him and the other conspirators the monies that he promised them is a viable judgment upon which to suspect that the king

Studies day and night
To answer all the debt he owes to you
Even with the bloody payment of your death.
(1.I.iii.184-6)

From a Machiavellian point of view, such a policy is indeed sound, since it not only cancels out a substantial “debt”, but also eliminates a Bushy and Green-like dissent to the Lancastrian rule. Whether a penitent King Henry IV has renounced murder as a viable political tactic, however, is inconclusive, but suspicions persist.

Previously, I have quoted a passage from the first conversation between the king and the prince, which reveals the king’s obsession with the “praises of men”. Now, from the same scene, I will consider another disturbing revelation of the king’s personality:

Had I so lavish of my presence been,
So common-hackneyed in the eyes of men,
So stale and cheap to vulgar company,
Opinion, that did help me to the crown,
Had still kept loyal to possession,
And left me in reputeless banishment,
A fellow of no mark nor likelihood.

(1.III.ii.39-45)

Holderness interprets this part of the king’s speech as an indication of what he calls the king’s “aristocratic exclusiveness”, which means that the king is excessively contemptuous of the people, things and values which constitute his state (98). To further advance this interpretation, Holderness cites a longer excerpt from the same scene:

The skipping King, he ambled up and down,
With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled, and soon burnt; carded his state,
Mingled his royalty with cap’ring fools...
Grew a companion to the common streets,
Enfeoff’d himself to popularity,
That, being daily swallowed by men’s eyes,
They surfeited with honey...
...seen, but with such eyes
As, sick and blunted with community,
Afford no extraordinary gaze,
Such as is bent on sun-like majesty
When it shines seldom in admiring eyes...

(1.III.ii.60-3,68-71,76-80)

In these lines, Holderness continues, the king expresses an aristocratic scorn for “vulgar company”, the “common streets”, “popularity” and “community”. This type of exploitative contempt for the people, he concludes, reveals his underlying motivation to rule his newly acquired kingdom in the capacity of an absolutist monarch. Moreover, Holderness concludes secondly that King Henry’s less than

flattering portrait of a “God’s ambassador” is an indication of his disbelief in the divine sanctity of the kingship (98-100).

Regarding Holderness’s former conclusion, I think that the text does not portray the king attempting to establish his alleged absolutist designs over his subjects, but only trying to survive two very serious threats to his authority. But then again, textual analysis is simply one, perhaps lesser discipline of Cultural Materialist criticism, which seeks, Dollimore writes, to recover the historical and political dimensions or effects of Renaissance literature (2,7). (Such a literary approach is indeed admirable, but does not it lead the Shakespearean critic away from the text itself, the plots and characterizations of which are superbly intricate, demanding detailed analysis, to an enormous and overwhelming body of historical data, the study of which may, sadly, have no actual relevance to the text?) I agree with Holderness, however, that King Henry has a contempt for the “common people” whose praise he and to a greater extent, his son have so cultivated throughout this tetralogy. In some respects, the king is a character who desires the almost god-like adoration of a people for whom he has nothing but disdain. Moreover, even after his crusade speech of 1.I.i. and the “rod of heaven” speech at the beginning of this scene, he revels in the seemingly unscrupulous manner by which he exploited and duped the commoners. Greenblatt, never actually addressing this or any other significant portion of the text of the Henriad, advances this theme of social and class dichotomy, condemning the Prince’s abusive treatment of Francis in 1.II.iv. (31-2); but I think that Greenblatt is in error to condemn a medieval prince for violating modern republican notions of human equality. Tillyard, as I have previously stated, points out that the common people were, during the era of feudal England, almost universally regarded by the noblemen as being sub-human beasts. Perhaps the king is simply a creature of his age, but then again I think that a character who repeatedly calls upon a compassionate God, may have a more sympathetic opinion of the “common streets”.

Regarding Holderness’s later conclusion, I think that on the one hand he is right to say that the king’s mockery of the “skipping king” is a denial of divine right. Although Holderness doesn’t actually develop this theme, the precedent has clearly been established in *Richard II* that a subject of the king, fearing either God or the execution block, will publicly honour him even if he or she secretly despises him. John of Gaunt, for example, the great advocate of divine right, will neither “lift/An angry arm against His minister” nor verbally defame him even though he considers him to be responsible for his brother’s death. Only when he is upon his

deathbed, possibly influenced by a fever-induced delirium, does he dare to accuse the king of England of criminal or foolish conduct. The Duchess of Gloucester, who has been told by Gaunt that the king has “caus’d” her husband’s death, never directly expresses her hatred for the “butcher” king, even during a private conversation with her brother-in-law who shares her views, but displaces it upon the executor of the king’s bidding, the hapless Mowbray:

O sit my husband’s wrongs on Hereford’s spear,
That it may enter butcher Mowbray’s breast!
(*Richard II*, I.ii.47-8)

Bolingbroke, of course, does not confront the person of the king, but like the duchess, abuses the “traitor and miscreant” Mowbray. And even King Richard, who clearly understands Bolingbroke’s ultimate design of usurpation, never openly defies him, referring to him as his “noble cousin” (III.iii.122) and his “fair cousin” (III.iii.190), simply because he respects him as a man who, like himself, springs from the “most royal root”. When King Henry refers to his predecessor as a companion of “rash bavin wits”, therefore, he is violating an established norm of aristocratic behaviour, and saying by implication that the king was not “God’s substitute”, but an ordinary fool.

On the other hand, however, the king may have adopted a revised interpretation of divine right which differentiates between the King’s Two Bodies. In this scenario the Body Natural has failed to fulfil the obligations of the Body Politic, thereby annulling all of the duty and respect which would normally be given to him. But I think that an even more plausible interpretation of the “skipping king” speech is that King Henry has a guilt or remorse for what he has done, and so he degrades or unconsciously slanders the memory of his victim to lessen the magnitude of his own misdeed. The text certainly affords no evidence to substantiate a “skipping king” who laughs at “gibing boys” and frequents the “common streets”, but if King Henry can convince himself that King Richard had indulged in such behaviour, then the deposition is no longer a usurpation nor he, as Carlisle says, a “foul traitor”: it becomes a “necessity” and he a national hero. Only in this fanciful reconstruction can he escape the recollection of the terrible prophecies that the bishop spoke during the depositional ceremony.

And finally, the treaty which the king offers Worcester just before the battle of Shrewsbury is not a little perplexing. He says:

No, good Worcester, no,
We love our people well, even those we love
That are misled upon your cousin’s part,
And, will they take the offer of our grace,

Both he, and they, and you, yea, every man
Shall be my friend again, and I'll be his:
So tell your cousin, and bring me word
What he will do.

(1.V.i.103-10)

Does the king actually “love” the people of his kingdom, thinking that they are simply “misled” by Northumberland? And does the king’s alleged compassion for his deceived subjects actually prompt him to offer them and the rebel leaders his “friendship”, if they will lay down their arms? He continues:

But if he will not yield,
Rebuke and dread correction wait on us,
And they shall do their office. So, be gone;
We will not now be troubled with reply:
We offer fair; take it advisedly.

(1.V.i.110-4)

On the one hand, the king warns them that he has the authority to administer “rebuke and dread correction” if they do not surrender, but does not Shakespeare also allow the king to say that these things “wait” on the king himself for having instigated the civil wars? If the latter, then the king sincerely offers them a genuine proposal which can prevent a war that will bring on him the “rod of heaven”. But then the king, in saying that he will “not now be troubled with reply”, seems to be revealing the Machiavellian aspect of his pledge, as we shall see.

The prince advises the king that:

It will not be accepted, on my life;
The Douglas and the Hotspur both together
Are confident against the world in arms.

(1.V.i.115-7)

That the prince believes that his father’s offer is genuine is significant. The limitations of this thesis will not allow me to enter into a detailed analysis of the prince’s character, one of the primary features of which is his ability to discern the motivations and intentions of the other characters in the play. For example, his judgments of Falstaff in the “I know thee all” speech in 1.I.ii. and elsewhere, of Poins in 2.I.ii. and of Hotspur in 1.II.iv. and again in 1.V.i., clearly establish him as a character whose opinions of the other characters has weight and credibility. The king recognizes this quality in his son and accepts unreservedly his judgment of Douglas and Hotspur, saying:

Hence, therefore, every leader to his charge,
For on their answer will we set on them,
And God befriend us as our cause is just!

(1.V.i.118-20)

Has the king actually received the prince's opinion, discarding his own original intention of honourably waiting for the reply of the rebel leaders before commencing the battle, or has the prince merely confirmed the strategy of a Machiavellian prince who will not be "troubled" with a response to another false oath? In either case, the king's decision to "set on them" when the rebel leaders return to deliver their reply is disturbingly less than what one might expect from a chivalrous and Christian king. Moreover, the king's mention of God's name immediately after deciding to implement a policy which is apparently deceitful and unscrupulous, tends to support the equally disturbing premise that the Lancastrian family or at least King Henry, only speak what Greenblatt calls a "pious humbug" (28-30) to legitimise their corrupt agenda.

Worcester, however, thinks that the king's proposal is legitimate. Speaking to Vernon, he says:

Wor. O, no, my nephew must not know, Sir Richard,
The liberal and kind offer of the king

Ver. "Twere best he did.

Wor. Then are we all undone.
It is not possible, it cannot be,
He will suspect us still, and find a time
To punish this offence in other faults.

(1.V.ii.1-7)

Why does Worcester insist that Hotspur "must" be ignorant of the king's offer? And why does he say that they are "undone" if he learns of it? The earl seems to fear that Hotspur will accept what he thinks is a false treaty and as a consequence, they will "all" be "undone" or "punish[ed]" with death. But I think that Worcester has another agenda, saying:

Suspicion all our lives shall be stuck full of eyes,
For treason is but trusted like the fox,
Who, ne'er so tame, so cherish'd and lock'd up,
Will have a wild trick of his ancestors.

(1.V.ii.8-11)

Worcester is a "fox" who knows that not even whatever "wild trick" he can devise will prevent his coming destruction. Upon hearing the "frosty sound" (1.IV.i.128) of the news that Worcester's army is delayed, he undoubtedly agrees with Hotspur who exclaims, "Doomsday is near-die all, die merrily" (1.IV.i.134). He rejects the treaty as a solution to their dilemma, saying that the king will not "keep his word in

loving us", but the "us" to which he refers includes only Northumberland, Vernon and himself. Regarding Hotspur, however, he says:

My nephew's trespass may be well forgot,
It hath the excuse of youth and heat of blood,
And an adopted name of privilege-
A hare-brained Hotspur, governed by a spleen.
All his offences live upon my head
And on his father's. We did train him on,
And his corruption being ta'en from us,
We as the spring of all shall pay for all.
Therefore, good cousin, let not Harry know,
In any case, the offer of the king.
(1.V.ii.16-25)

Worcester actually insists that Hotspur "must" be ignorant of the king's offer because he thinks that if Hotspur knows of it, he might accept what is for him a genuine pardon. Such a phenomenon will "undo" Worcester because he despises his "hare-brained" nephew and desires that he, like himself, should be destroyed in the coming "doomsday". The first sign of a conflict between Hotspur and Worcester is in 1.I.iii. where Hotspur, ranting and raving about the "cozener" (1.I.iii.255), continually interrupts Worcester as he attempts to disclose the strategy of the rebellion. Finally he relents and gives his uncle permission to continue, but Worcester says sarcastically:

Nay, if you have not, to it again;
We will stay your leisure.
(1.I.iii.257-8)

After Hotspur mocks Glendower in the Archdeacon's house, Worcester again reproves him:

In faith, my lord, you are too wilful-blame,
And since your coming hither have done enough
To put him quite beside his patience;
You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault:
Though sometimes it shows greatness, courage, blood,-
And that's the dearest grace it renders you,-
Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,
Defect of manners, want of government,
Pride, haughtiness, opinion and disdain,
The least of which haunting a nobleman
Loseth men's hearts, and leaves behind a stain
Upon the beauty of all parts besides,
Beguiling them of commendation.
(1.III.i.174-86)

Northumberland reveals to Hotspur that his “haughty” and “opinionated” personality “loseth” or has lost the friendship of men in general and him in particular. When Hotspur proposes to recklessly sally forth against the royalist army before the rebel army is fully assembled, a desperate and frustrated Worcester angrily opposes him:

The number of the king exceedeth ours.
For God’s sake, cousin, stay till all come in.
(1.IV.iii.28-9)

Worcester assumes that he himself is condemned whether he fights a superior royalist army or whether he capitulates and accepts the king’s bogus treaty. To ensure that the “fool” is condemned to his own grisly fate, he denies him access to the pardon. For Worcester, the king’s offer is genuine, but only for Hotspur.

After the battle, the king says to Worcester his prisoner:

Thus ever did rebellion find rebuke.
Ill-spirited Worcester, did not we send grace,
Pardon, and terms of love to all of you?
And wouldst thou turn our offers contrary?
Misuse the tenour of thy kinsman’s trust?
Three knights upon our party slain to-day,
A noble earl and many a creature else,
Had been alive this hour,
If like a Christian thou hadst truly borne
Betwixt our armies true intelligence.
(1.V.v.1-10)

The king insists that his offer extended not only to Hotspur, but to “all” of the rebels, Worcester included. Moreover he seems to demonstrate a Christian compassion not only for the noblemen who die, but also for the commoners or “creatures”, as he refers to them: yet such a term seems to have a certain sub-human connotation, as if they were indeed expendable in the pursuit of his own ends. Worcester, however, maintains his distrust in the king’s offer towards him personally:

What I have done my safety urg’d me to;
And I embrace this fortune patiently,
Since not to be avoided it falls on me.
(1.V.v.11-3)

The king, of course, condemns him:

Bear Worcester to the death, and Vernon too:
Other offenders we will pause upon.
(1.V.v.14-5)

Since the king never actually interacts with Vernon, we cannot criticize him for condemning what he probably does not know is a seemingly virtuous and admirable character. We may, however, suspect that the king has Bolingbroke-like intentions when he speaks of the “other offenders” whom he previously said were the “misled people”. It is cruel and unjust to condemn them also because their “ill-spirited” leader rejected the “terms of love”; yet the king says only, and rather ambiguously that he will “pause” upon them. Will he “pause” simply delaying their execution, or will he “pause” and consider granting them a pardon? The answer to this question, like the general interpretation of the “offer of grace”, cannot be known with any certainty.

When we compare King Henry IV to his son, John of Lancaster, however, the former can only be esteemed. In Gaultree Forest, Lancaster seems, like his father, to offer the rebel leaders a treaty of reconciliation:

My lord, these griefs shall be with speed redress'd;
Upon my soul, they shall. If this may please you,
Discharge your powers unto their several counties,
As we will ours: and here between the armies
Let's drink together friendly and embrace.
That all their eyes may bear those tokens home
Of our restored love and amity.
(2.IV.ii.59-65)

Once the archbishop takes Lancaster's “princely word” (2.IV.ii.66), however, and disbands the rebel army, Lancaster arrests the trio for “capital treason”. Protesting feebly, the archbishop asks, “Will you thus break your faith?” (2.IV.ii.111). And Lancaster replies:

I pawn'd thee none.
I promis'd you redress of these same grievances
Whereof you did complain; which, by mine honour,
I will perform with a most Christian care.
But for you, rebels, look to taste the due
Meet for rebellion and such acts as yours.
Most shallowly did you these arms commence,
Fondly brought here and foolishly sent hence.
Strike up our drums! pursue the scattered stray:
God, and not we, hath safely fought to-day.
Some guard these traitors to the block of death;
Treason's true bed, and yielder up of breath.
(2.IV.ii.111-22)

Greenblatt says that Prince Hal is a “juggler” (30) or a Machiavellian prince who advances a Christian morality only to achieve certain prescribed political ends; but I think that such a judgment is more aptly applied to Lancaster. One of the primary concepts of the Mosaic tradition is honesty:

Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord.

(*Leviticus*, 19:11-2)

Lancaster clearly identifies himself with this tradition, speaking of his “soul” and a “most Christian care”. Moreover he seals the agreement by sharing a kind of communion with the rebels. (Ironically it is really a type of Last Supper for them.) But almost inhumanly, he does, as the Archbishop complains, “break [his] faith” or deny the biblical dictates which he says that he avows. He clearly lies to them when he promises to “discharge” his army, and then afterwards sniggers when he sarcastically asks Westmoreland, “Now, cousin, wherefore stands our army still?” (2.IV.ii.97).

West. The leaders, having charge from you to stand
Will not go off until they hear you speak.

Lan. They know their duties.

(2.IV.ii.98-100)

Obviously Lancaster knew previously that his captains would not disband even though Westmoreland, the second in command, had commanded them to do so.

Lancaster also jeers at and mocks the condemned men. Like a master of the Machiavellian policy, he points out the errors which his dull students, having once committed, will pay for with their lives. Firstly, he explains that he never explicitly “pawn’d” or guaranteed them a pardon, but only that he would address their grievances. Secondly he explains to them that a Machiavellian prince never disbands his army while negotiating with an enemy who only promises to disband his. But Lancaster’s mockery is not limited to only Mowbray, Hastings and York; he also mocks or, as Moses writes, “profanes the name of...God”. He boasts, after the successful conclusion of his negotiations, that “God and not we, hath safely fought today” (2.IV.ii.121). Leech says that the sentiment is blasphemous (35) and I concur, thinking that it relegates “God” to a mere partnership with a man whose ruthless political ambition is unbounded by any code of morality.

Whether the prince actually engages in a mass extermination is initially uncertain since he only says, “Strike up our drums! pursue the scatter’d stray” (2.IV.ii.120); but the pounding of the drums is the appropriate setting for a heathen-like sacrifice, and the imagery of a “scatter’d stray” has the connotation of a flock of sheep which, being lost, is not found by a good shepherd, but “pursued” by a wolf-like or devilish predator. Our worst fears are realized when Westmoreland re-enters

and says, "Retreat is made and execution stay'd" (2.IV.iii.70). There has indeed been a slaughter and Lancaster, unmoved by Coleville's eloquent but pathetic defense of his part in the rebellion, sends him as well as his "confederates" (the number of which is unspecified but may very well be significant) to their deaths. Falstaff says that Lancaster is a "young sober-blooded boy" (2.IV.iii.86-7), but such a judgment is a gross understatement: he is a monster of unparalleled proportions whose dealings with York are meant to contrast with and positively enhance the policy by which King Henry interacts with Worcester. Whereas King Henry may or may not have lied to the rebel leaders, Lancaster unabashedly does; and whereas King Henry may or may not have murdered the fleeing rebel soldiers, Lancaster inhumanly does. Whatever King Henry is, Shakespeare never allows him to become a John of Lancaster.

In an effort to determine the characterization of King Henry IV, I have examined many, if not all of the scenes in which the king is either in soliloquy, discoursing with another character or is the topic of another character's judgment; and having done so, I acknowledge the complexities which deny any simple interpretation of his characterization. But still I ask the question: does the king experience some remorse for usurping the throne and murdering his own cousin the king? Yes, I think he does, but I also think that he sometimes exhibits a behaviour which is suspiciously contrary to Christian ethical standards. The most notable examples of this discrepancy are his boasting of how he came to the throne in 1.III.ii. and his explanation of the actual purpose of the crusade in 2.V.ii. It is a mistake, however, to focus exclusively on these complexities of his character, as Greenblatt and Holderness have done, and conclude that King Henry IV is a Machiavellian prince. Initially, Bolingbroke is a sinister figure untouched by either the idealisms of a divinely sanctioned political system or by a code of moral conduct, but at some unspecified time in *Richard II*, probably during the depositional ceremony itself, he experiences a moral transformation in which he feels remorse for what he has done. It is not an unreasonable psychological principle to expect a man to tell an intimate friend those thoughts which are dearest to him just before he dies, and it is also a convention of Elizabethan theatre that what a character says on his deathbed is true (Cochrane). King Henry's final words to his son are:

How I came by the crown, O God, forgive!
And grant it may with thee in true peace live.
(2.IV.v.217-8)

CHAPTER XIII

THE ELUSIVE PRINCE/KING

During the course of this thesis, I have essentially ignored the characterization of Prince Hal/King Henry V for two reasons: firstly, the limitations of a project of this kind will not allow me to analyze the characterizations of what I consider to be a Christ-like King Richard and a diabolical Bolingbroke who, in turn, becomes a penitent king, as well as a prince who becomes the “mirror of all Christian kings”. Secondly, Prince Hal, like Sir John Falstaff,¹ repeatedly speaks of King Henry IV throughout the course of both parts of *Henry IV*, but never in terms which are clearly adversarial or complimentary; and since the primary focus of Part Two of my thesis has been to determine the characterization of King Henry IV, I have generally avoided his comments, as well as those of the fat knight, neither of which advance nor hinder my argument.

In Eastcheap, for example, Falstaff pretends to be the king and the Prince says to him, “Thy state is taken for a joined-stool, thy golden sceptre for a leaden dagger, and thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald head” (1.II.iv.372-4). Is the prince addressing Falstaff or the one whom he represents? If the latter, then who “takes” his father’s “state” for a “joined-stool” and his “golden sceptre” for a “leaden dagger”? The Prince himself? The rebels? And what does he mean when he uses the word “take”: is he saying that he regards or “takes” his father not as the legitimate king who holds a “golden sceptre”, but as a usurper who has a “leaden dagger”? Or is he saying that the rebels usurp or “take” the kingdom which his father, compelled by “necessity”, honourably rescued from the hands of a “wasteful king”? In another instance, the prince, having finally met his father in the palace, returns to the Boar’s Head Tavern and tells Falstaff, “I am good friends with my father, and may do anything” (1.III.iii.181). Is the prince implying that his father is an honourable man who values an intimate relationship with his son, or is he mocking him, saying that he is a fool to think that they are “good friends” when in actuality, the prince has deceived him. That the prince is an unscrupulous character is further suggested when he says that he may now “do anything”. Such a statement has suspicious connotations as if to suggest that he plans to publicly and unabashedly flaunt the law, engaging in rash, even illegal acts, smugly assured that he will not be reprimanded because his father, who is his “good friend”, will protect him. In 2.V.ii., the Lord Chief Justice apparently confirms this interpretation when he boldly explains to the new king why he imprisoned him during the days of his princehood, saying, “Your highness pleased to forget my place” (2.V.ii.77). Holinshed plainly reveals the reason why the historical prince

was imprisoned, saying that "to hie offense of the king his father, he [the prince] had with his fist striken the cheefe iustice for sending one of his minions (vpon desert) to prison: when the iustice stoutlie commanded himselfe also streict to ward, & he (then prince) obeied" (qtd. in Boswell, 161). But Shakespeare conceals the exact nature of the prince's offence, forcing us to speculate. On the one hand, we conclude that his offence is serious because the Justice, being apparently a virtuous judge, imprisons him. Moreover, the king himself seems to consent to his judgment:

You did commit me:
For which, I do commit into your hand
The unstained sword that you have us'd to bear;
With this remembrance, that you use the same
With the like bold, just, and impartial spirit
As you have done 'gainst me.
(2.V.ii.112-117)

On the other hand, however, we remember 2.I.ii. where Falstaff dominates the Justice, talking to him as though he is a buffon; and so we conclude that he is still a man of principle, but perhaps lacking the wisdom to judge and sentence offenders properly. Initially the king rebukes him:

How might a prince of my great hopes forget
So great indignities you laid upon me?
What! rate, rebuke, and roughly send to prison
Th' immediate heir of England!
(2.V.ii.68-71)

The Justice may be a passionate, impulsive man who abuses his authority, but because the prince, accused of being a prodigal, desires to associate himself with the appropriate values that he represents, he simply tolerates the priggish man. Who is Shakespeare's Prince Hal/King Henry V?

His dying father says:

And at my death
Thou hast sealed up my expectation:
Thy life did manifest thou lov'dst me not,
And thou wilt have me died assur'd of it.
(2.IV.v.101-4)

When the prince takes his crown, the king is not surprised, having always had an "expectation" that his son would eventually reveal the duplicity of his character; that he would ultimately reveal that he only honours him as a means to secure what he covets, namely his crown. Of course, Hal emotionally defends himself, compelling

the king to reevaluate what appears to have been an erroneous judgment, but the king's declaration that Hal "lov'dst [him] not" is a concept which cannot be easily dismissed, since it haunts both parts of *Henry IV*. For example, after King Henry IV dies, King Henry V says to the Lord Chief Justice:

There is my hand:
You shall be as a father to my youth;
My voice shall sound as you do prompt mine ear,
And I will stoop and humble my intents
To your well-practis'd wise directions.
And, princes all, believe me, I beseech you;
My father is gone wild into his grave,
For in his tomb lie my affections;
And with his spirit sadly I survive,
To mock the expectation of the world,
To frustrate prophecies, and to raze out
Rotten opinion, who hath writ me down
After my seeming.

(2.V.ii.117-29)

That King Henry IV has died in what appears to be a state of "wildness" suggests the idea that he was not a penitent, but a lawless, Ishmael-like king. Indeed, King Henry V says that his "affection" or devotion for his father is dead or in a "tomb", suggesting that he was alienated from a man, even his own father, who not only usurped the "precious crown" of King Richard, but wore it "wild[ly]" or unrepentantly. However, the king may also be saying that his father was "wild" in the sense that being denied his son's "affection", he was deeply troubled and died with a broken heart. In this interpretation, the prince disregards or even despises his father not because he has violated some moral code, but because he himself is a delinquent who is concerned only with the dictates of his greed, namely the crown; and since this was denied him while his father lived, he displaces his frustration upon him, slandering his name. Or perhaps he is saying that his father is "wild" only because he is a regenerative figure who has taken upon himself his son's "affections" or, as Rutland contends, his "wild inclinations" (132). To further complicate the interpretation of these lines, it should be noted that the king does not actually say that his "affection" is dead, but only that it is "lying" in his father's tomb. Such an expression can mean that his filial devotion will always be with his father: indeed, he says that "with his spirit sadly I survive", indicating perhaps that he desires to continue an intimate relationship with his father whose death he mourns. Moreover, he states that he only "survives", as if to suggest that he cannot enjoy life now that his "good friend" has died. That the king, however, advances unscrupulous or Machiavellian tactics, "mocking" and "frustrating" and "razing out" certain ideas (or perhaps enemies since he refers to them not as "which" but

“who”) which are suspiciously undefined, only further complicates his characterization, as well as the interpretation of these lines. Perhaps, being “with his [father’s] spirit”, he is practicing those methods which, according to Holderness, Henry IV practised, namely the production of subversive discontent as a means of consolidating political power. Indeed, why does the king “beseech” the princes to “believe” him that his father is “gone wild” into his grave? Is he “razing out” the “rotten opinion” that his father was penitent, provoking them to remember that he, being the son of a usurper, is an illegitimate king who should be deposed? These lines, therefore, being hopelessly ambiguous, cannot begin to resolve the question of whether King Henry IV died with or without a certain remorse for his part in the usurpation.

Finally, just before the battle of Agincourt, King Henry V prays:

Not to-day, O Lord!
O not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown!
I Richard’s body have interred new,
And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay,
Who twice a day their wither’d hands hold up
Toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have built
Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
Sing still for Richard’s soul. More will I do;
Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
Since that my penitence comes after all,
Imploring pardon.

(Henry V, IV.i.298-311)

In one respect, these lines portray a Christian king who not only recognizes that his father “compassed” or usurped the crown, but who also attempts to rectify his “fault” by interring Richard’s body and building chantries. Moreover King Henry V also suggests that his father did not perform the religious ceremonies and works that might have appeased an angry God, and was therefore a “wild” and unrepentant man. In another respect, however, these lines portray a Machiavellian king who recognizes the “fault” that his father committed in “compassing” or consolidating his gain. King Henry V suggests that having assassinated the king, his father neglected to perform those religious ceremonies and works which might appease, not necessarily an angry God, but those subjects who may have questions about the legitimacy of Lancastrian rule. And what does King Henry V mean when he says, “Though all that I can do is nothing worth,/Since my penitence comes after all/Imploring pardon”? Is he saying that God cannot be appeased because his “penitence” for his father’s “fault” comes after “all” of the “by-paths and indirect

crook'd ways" that his father walked, or is he saying that God cannot be appeased because his "penitence" for his own "affections" comes after "all" of the "barren pleasures" (I.III.ii.14) that he himself apparently enjoyed? And for whom is the king "imploping pardon"? His father? Himself? If the former, then apparently King Henry IV never received a "pardon" for his "fault", either because he never sought one, or because he sought a pardon, but God denied him it because his sins were just too heinous to forgive. The king's prayer, like his other declarations which I have cited, tend to raise questions and speculations about the characterization of King Henry IV, only confounding an already complex issue.

In summary, Prince Hal/King Henry V repeatedly speaks of his father during the course of the tetralogy, but whereas he judges other characters, such as Falstaff, in no uncertain terms, he colours whatever opinion he may have of his father in terms which are ambiguous. In an attempt to understand what the prince/king is saying about his father, I have briefly analyzed the characterization of the prince/king himself and concluded that in these few examples, he is portrayed as a delinquent whose greed and ambition colour his judgments of his father; as a Machiavel who criticizes the "faulty" policies of a fellow Machiavel and even maligns his name as a means of consolidating his own political power; and as a Christian king who, on the one hand, rejects his father as a usurper, and on the other, admires him as a deliverer, even a champion, saying:

My gracious liege
You won, wore it, kept it, gave it me,
Then plain and right must my possession be.
(2.IV.v.219-21)

Oddly, however, the prince says that the king "won" the crown, as if to suggest that it is merely the prize of some conflict which presumably will be fought even in his own reign, and not the "right" of a particular individual ordained by a providential power. Or perhaps he is mercifully attempting to assuage the disturbed conscience of a dying man: instead of telling him the hard truth that he successfully "stole" the crown, he softens it by saying that he "won" it. The characterization of Prince Hal/King Henry V is remarkably complicated and cannot be adequately addressed in this brief chapter. In the final exhaustive analysis, however, I think that Shakespeare portrays Hal not as Holinshed's violent prodigal, but as a virtuous character who initially despises his usurping father and rejects his sudden fate as the heir apparent;² and finally, pities his father and learns to accept him, but never the "fault" of the usurpation. Prince Hal/King Henry V is, like King Richard II,

² Hal's soliloquy in 1.I.ii., however, does not easily yield to this interpretation.

whatever the reader wants him to be, but his comments about his father, considered in isolation apart from the entirety of his characterization, are very ambiguous and do not even begin to clarify the characterization of King Henry IV.

NOTES

¹ Falstaff, like the prince, never speaks of the king in terms which are unmistakably positive or negative. He is repeatedly portrayed, however, as being a character who has not the slightest hesitation to reveal the shortcomings of other characters within the play. Regarding Owen Glendower, for example, Falstaff says, "That same mad fellow of the north, Percy, and he of Wales, that gave Amamon the bastinado and made Lucifer cuckold, and swore the devil his true liegeman upon the cross of a Welsh hook - what a plague call you him" (1.II.iv.328-32)? Responding to Doll Tearsheet who has suggested that Poins has a "good wit", Falstaff says, "He a good wit? hang him, baboon! his wit's as thick as Tewkesbury mustard, there's no more conceit in him than is in a malet" (2.II.iv.230-2). Of Justice Shallow, he says, "This same starved justice hath done nothing but prate to me of the wildness of is youth and the feats he hath done about Turnbull Street; and every third word a lie, duer paid to the hearer than the Turk's tribute" (2.III.ii.289-93). And he says to Doll, "If the cook help make the gluttony, you help to make the diseases, Doll. We catch of you, Doll, we catch of you" (2.II.iv.43-5); suggesting that she is a prostitute who spreads venereal disease to her many customers. And even with regard to the prince, he says derogatorily, "A good shallow young fellow, a' would have made a good pantler, a' would have chipped bread well" (2.II.iv.227-8).

Regarding the king, however, he curbs this tendency, saying only those things about him which are ambiguous or vaguely offensive. For example, when he tells the prince about the first rebellion, he says, "...thy father's beard is turned white with the news" (1.II.iv.351-2). Although the idea of cowardice is remotely suggested, we cannot conclusively state that such a meaning is his intention. Speaking to Hal in the tavern, he says, "The king himself is to be feared as the lion; dost thou think I'll fear thee as I fear thy father? nay, an I do, I pray God my girdle break" (1.III.iii.149-51). When Falstaff says that the king is to "be feared", does he mean that a subject is to "honour" him or to "be afraid" of him? If the latter, then on the one hand, Falstaff seems to not only say that he honours the king, but also that he accepts the philosophy of a God-ordained universe, since he associates King Henry with another primate within the chain of being, namely, the lion. Is Falstaff saying that he thinks that King Henry IV is, as Blunt declares, "anointed majesty" (1.IV.iii.40) established by God? If, on the other hand, he is referring to the former definition, then he seems to indicate that he is or should be, "afraid" of a man who, like the lion, has the power to kill or execute whomsoever he wishes. However, we should also note the Falstaff may not be talking about himself personally because he uses a passive verb, the subject of which is undefined. He may be saying that the model citizen should "fear" the king whereas he, being the "Lord of Misrule", does not. Regarding the question that he poses, I think that it actually begs another question, namely, how does Falstaff "fear" the king: earnestly; falsely? He is suspiciously ambiguous. In another example, Falstaff, speaking in soliloquy, utters what may be his most incriminating judgment of King Henry IV, saying, "Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant, for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father he hath, like lean, sterile and bare land, manured, husbanded and tilled with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant" (2.IV.iii.114-9). What does Falstaff mean when he insinuates that the king has "cold blood"? On the one hand we think that he is saying that he is a heartless, morally indifferent man, but on the other hand, he may simply be saying that he does not drink that beverage which "warms" the blood, namely sherris! Why does Falstaff clearly demean other characters within the play, but never the king?

Falstaff is an opportunist who imagines that the new Lancastrian king is a means by which he can receive honour and riches. On the battlefield of Shrewsbury, he throws down the corpse of Hotspur and says, "If your father will do me any honour, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself...I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you" (1.IV.iv.140-2). Undoubtedly, Falstaff can, if he chooses, reproach the king and then, if challenged, devise some witticism to refute whatever allegation is raised against him. Indeed, in the Boar's Head Tavern, after he has spoken derogatorily of the prince, Poins says, "My lord, he will drive you out of your revenge, and turn all to a merriment, if you take not the heat" (2.II.iv.288-9); and so he does. Falstaff boldly criticises those who have no authority or, in the case of the prince, no inclination to penalize him, but he shrewdly desists from criticising the one who, being unamused, has the power to withhold the "remedy against this consumption of [his] purse" (2.I.ii.231-2).

CONCLUSION

The divine right of kings is a political philosophy which is espoused by several characters within the History Plays; but whether Shakespeare himself, like the Bishop of Carlisle, actually believed that the king was "the figure of God's majesty,/His captain, steward, deputy elect" (*Richard II*, IV.i.126-7) cannot, contrary to Tillyard's opinion, be stated categorically. What can be concluded with reasonable assurance though, is that Shakespeare was patriotic. The clearest indication of Shakespeare's patriotism is that the plots of his historical dramas largely correspond with the events that Holinshed, Tudor England's authorised historian, recorded in his *Chronicles*. Of course, the subplot of *Henry IV* has no detailed precedent in the *Chronicles*, but I think that Tillyard is correct to assert that the action in the Boar's Head Tavern, as well as in Justice Shallow's house, is part of an epic-celebration of the common life of Tudor England (303-4). Wilson contends that Shakespeare is a "patriot of the highest order" (138), and judging from the general historical accuracy of the main plot and the panorama of Englishmen and women who are portrayed in the subplot, as well as the speeches honouring the "royal throne of kings" and the "feast of [Saint] Crispian", I am inclined to agree; but some critics, shifting their focus from the text itself to other considerations, do not.

The Cultural Materialists cautiously assert that Shakespeare was influenced by certain ideologies which were not consistent with the dominant culture of Tudor England. To understand what Shakespeare is doing in the History Plays, they contend, a laborious study of the "relevant" historical materials and phenomena of Renaissance England becomes a priority. Holderness, for example, argues that a detailed analysis of Holinshed's *Chronicles* reveals that the principal concept which it advances is that of the "great and fundamental conflict" between the Crown and the feudal barons of medieval England (53). He concludes that Shakespeare was influenced by Holinshed to portray the action in *Richard II* in the light of this historiography. Although Holderness's synopsis of Holinshed's *Chronicles* is controversial, the assertion that Shakespeare referred to them is a commonplace. Greenblatt insinuates that Machiavellianism influenced Shakespeare to write *Henry IV* as a testimony to the proficiency of corrupt political power (18-22), and attempts to clarify his position by summarising the argument of the Italian humanist. Moreover Greenblatt argues that a contemporary political text, entitled *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, contains ideologies which, being

common to Renaissance England, are also found in the second tetralogy (29-30). Although Tillyard says that the *Prince* had no effect whatsoever upon Shakespeare and the Elizabethans (21), and Vickers exposes Greenblatt's misconceptions about Machiavelli's philosophy (249-52), one of the principal characters within the second tetralogy, Bolingbroke/King Henry IV, whom Hotspur says is a "vile politician" (1.I.iii.241), can be interpreted as the "mirror of all Machiavellian princes". Whether Harriot's pamphlet, however, has even the slightest relevance to *Henry IV* is controversial. And finally, Holderness argues that the counter-culture within Shakespeare's England, which is well-documented by Bakhtin and others, seems to be personified in the character of Falstaff (134-40). Holderness devotes seven pages of his book to an analysis of Bakhtin's argument which becomes an essential prerequisite for a proper understanding of Falstaff's characterization. The New Historicists's conclusion that Shakespeare was influenced by the ideologies and historical phenomenon of his day is a reasonable assertion, but whether their exhaustive historical analysis proves that Shakespeare himself actually adopted a kind of Marxist historiography is inconclusive. Curiously, the Cultural Materialists, who claim that they have retrieved history from its "background status" and made it part of both the content and the perspective of their criticisms of Shakespearean texts (Dollimore, 2), ignore two of the greatest events in the history of Western Civilization, both of which, involving the English nation and occurring with Shakespeare's lifetime, had an enormous impact upon the thinking of the dramatist.

In 1588, the Roman Catholic king of Spain sent a large fleet of warships against a nation which had defied the pope and founded its own church. Against overwhelming odds, however, Sir Walter Drake and his seadogs successfully defended England and repelled the foreign invaders. Whether Shakespeare himself actually joined in the celebrations which naturally ensued, cannot be proved, but since Shakespeare wrote all of the English History Plays, except *Henry VIII*, by 1599, just eleven years after the battle of the Gravelines, we may speculate that he was inspired by the English victory. In the final scene of *King John*, Philip says:

This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them! Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.

(V.vii.112-8)

It is almost impossible to conclude that these lines do not reveal a patriotic Shakespeare, celebrating the defeat of the Armada. But they also reveal an apprehensive Shakespeare remembering the civil wars by which his “dear, dear, land” (*Richard II*, II.i.57) did “wound itself”. When Shakespeare read Holinshed’s account of fifteenth century England, he did not read the history of a

...teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear’d by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service, and true chivalry.
(*Richard II*, II.i.51-4)

Instead he read a disturbing record of the “field of Golgotha and dead men’s skulls” (*Richard II*, IV.i.144). Similarly, the History Plays contain many graphic images of bloodshed which betray a man who was distressed by the recent history of his country. King Richard, for example, warns Northumberland:

He [Bolingbroke] is come to open
The purple testament of bleeding war,
But ere the crown he looks for live in peace,
Ten thousand bloody crowns of mothers’ sons
Shall ill become the flower of England’s face,
Change the complexion of her maid-pale peace
To scarlet indignation, and bedew
Her pastures’ grass with faithful English blood.
(*Richard II*, III.iii.91-100)

To reconcile his conception of a mighty England that will never “lie at the foot of a proud conqueror” with Holinshed’s account of an England “wounded” by regicide and war, Shakespeare likens the history of his country to the history of the world as it is recorded and foretold in the Bible.

In 1526, William Tyndale published his English translation of the Greek New Testament, marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in England. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance that this movement had not only upon the English nation, but upon Shakespeare himself. Judging from the numerous biblical references and themes which are contained within Shakespeare’s dramatic works, we can confidently state that he was profoundly influenced by the Geneva Bible, the great forerunner of the Authorised Version. In Part One of this thesis, I have argued that Shakespeare portrays King Richard not as a “prodigal, ambitious and much giuen to the pleasure of the bodie”, but as a type of Christ sacrificed that England might receive her “mirror of all Christian kings” and ultimately Queen Elizabeth who, as a babe, is blessed by the Archbishop Thomas Cranmer:

In her days every man shall eat in safety
Under his own vine what he plants, and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.
God shall be truly known, and those about her
From her shall read the perfect ways of honour,
And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.

(*Henry VIII*, V.iv.33-8)

Whereas King Richard is a type of sacrificial Christ, Queen Elizabeth is a type of conquering Christ, ushering in an English millenium of peace and prosperity. In Part Two, I have argued that Shakespeare portrays Bolingbroke as a type of Satan who criminally deposes and murders “anointed majesty”. But unlike the biblical Satan, he, as King Henry IV, is made to repent of his “fault”, thereby delaying the divine retribution of the War of the Roses and permitting King Henry V to ascend the throne without controversy. Moreover, Shakespeare portrays a penitent King Henry IV because only such a king can incur the favour of a just God who in turns bestows a certain legitimacy and sanctity upon a usurped throne. The establishment of the Lancastrian dynasty as legitimate and anointed was important to Shakespeare because his queen Elizabeth speciously claimed the throne through her great grandfather who had married the widow of King Henry V, the son of a usurper.

The Bible says that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 *Peter*, 1:20-1). Although a particular verse of scripture is not of any “private interpretation”, having only one intended meaning, such is not the case with a given line or discourse in *Richard II* or *Henry IV*, many of which may have two or more intended meanings. During the course of my thesis, I have acknowledged some of the “private interpretations” of the Henriad, especially that of the Cultural Materialist, Graham Holderness. Neither he nor I have finally uncovered the “correct” interpretation of these plays as they contain a variety of themes and viewpoints, all of which cannot possibly be explained by any one particular system of thought. Although Tillyard’s conception of a religious Shakespeare advocating a universal order, has recently been rejected by many modern, secularly minded critics, it is still an argument which, being well supported by the text, will not go away. Indeed, Holderness decides that he must devote more than ten pages of his *Shakespeare Recycled* to the refutation of an argument which he dismisses as a mask of academic scholarship and essential conservatism (24). While reading the English History Plays, we certainly hear the voice that Holderness hears, namely that of a radical Shakespeare cynically refuting the moral and political systems of Tudor England,¹ but the other voice that Tillyard hears is louder and clearer. When King Henry’s dream of a

“new England” in which there is “no more” bloodshed and carnage (1.I.i) is finally realized after the death of King Richard III, a patriotic Shakespeare writes a prayer which, spoken by Henry Richmond, reveals the playwright’s expectation that his “fair land” will finally realize the destiny appointed unto her by God:

O, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal House,
By God’s fair ordinance conjoin together!
And let their heirs, God, if Thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-fac’d peace,
With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days!
Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
That would reduce these bloody days again,
And make poor England weep in streams of blood!
Let them not live to taste this land’s increase
That would with treason wound this fair land’s peace!
Now civil wounds are stopp’d, peace lives again;
That she may long live here, God say Amen!
(Richard III, V.v.29-41)

NOTES

¹ One immediately thinks of Sir John Falstaff who seems to be drinking a cup of sack and laughing at my point of view; or is he? Holderness says:

Falstaff clearly performs this function, in *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, of carnival. He constitutes a constant focus of opposition to the official and serious tone of authority: his discourse confronts and challenges those of king and state: his attitude to authority is always parodic and satirical: he mocks authority, flouts power, responds to the pressures of social duty and civic obligation by retreating into Bacchanalian revelry. His world is a world of ease, moral license, appetite and desire; of humour and ridicule, theatricals and satire, of community, freedom and abundance; a world created by inverting the abstract society, the oppression and hierarchy of the official world (138).

I agree with Holderness that Falstaff performs the function of carnival in *Henry IV*, but I do not agree with him that he is a “constant focus of opposition to the official and serious tone of authority” and that “his attitude to authority is **always** parodic and satirical”. Falstaff, like Gaunt and York, is not a static character. Behind the mask of “Bacchanalian revelry” is a lonely man longing to be accepted by Hal, who repeatedly and maliciously abuses him, saying, “knotty-pated fool” (1.II.iv.220) and “huge hill of flesh” (2.II.iv.237). When Hal mocks Falstaff for running away from him at Gad’s Hill, he is ashamed and says pathetically, “Ah! no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me” (1.II.iv.276). Indeed, Peto and Bardolph say that afterwards Falstaff was “hacking” his sword with his dagger so that the Prince would think that he fought bravely. After King Henry V rejects him, he is so distraught that he dies, crying out, “God, God, God” (*Henry V*, II.iii.19-20); but whether this exclamation is the blasphemy of a damned soul who sees the terrors of hell is unknown. Falstaff is also an obese man who frets, “Why, my skin hangs about me like an old lady’s loose gown, I am withered like an old apple-John” (1.III.iii.2-4). To his Page he says, “I do here walk before thee like a sow that hath overwhelmed all litter but one” (2.I.ii.11-2). (That Doll Tearsheet actually “fondles” him is repulsive, but her description of his “huge full hogshead” (2.II.iv.56-9) is nauseating.) And finally he is a sickly man suffering from a painful disease: “A pox of this gout! or, a gout of this pox! for the one or the other plays the rogue with this great toe” (2.I.ii.238-40). Bradley writes:

We praise him, we laud him, for he offends none but the virtuous, and denies that life is real or life is earnest, and delivers us from the oppression of such nightmares, and lifts us into the atmosphere of perfect freedom (73).

Bradley may “praise” and “laud” him, but Shakespeare pities a character who, enjoying “the pleasures of sin for a season” (*Hebrews*, 11:25), is afflicted with loneliness, obesity and illness in this life before sharing the fate of the Morality Vice in the next. Falstaff does not undermine the orthodox traditions which are largely advanced in the main plot; on the contrary, he confirms them, since Falstaff’s ignominious end, like that of Faustus, is Shakespeare’s warning to his Elizabethan audience that

Violent fires soon burn out themselves;
Small showers last long, but sudden storms are short;
He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes;
With eager feeding food doth choke the feeder;
Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,
Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.
(*Richard II*, II.i.33-9)

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